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# HILLFORD-ON-AIRE.

BY  
MARTIN WELD.

*IN THREE VOLUMES.*  
VOL. III.

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# HILLFORD-ON-AIRE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE CRICKET MATCH.

“To a level mead they came, and there  
They drave the wickets in.”

*Dream of Eugene Aram.*

THE cricket ground of Hillford is one of the prettiest spots in the neighbourhood of the town, both in respect of itself and in respect of the pleasant view it affords of the sunny hill-side. Situated to the south of the Aire, in the parish of Oakwood, it is the only level bit of ground within easy distance of Hillford, and is on all fine summer evenings the haunt of men and boys, eager to practise the noble game of cricket. It is never in

very first-rate condition, though it has undergone, and still undergoes, much doctoring. But this doctoring is of a desultory kind, the levelling, mowing, and rolling being done by fits and starts, according to the energy of the cricket club secretary in procuring funds, and his address in persuading the farmers to do the work.

The ground is bordered by a thick hedge-row, wherein grow occasional trees; while here and there, at a safe distance from the wickets, are clumps of fine elms, under the shade of which interested spectators repose themselves whenever there is a match. One of these clumps is regarded as a sort of grand stand, for there the *élite* of Hillford always congregate to watch the game.

On a hot August afternoon, a gay group of ladies, a few men in light summer clothes, some cricketers in flannels, with a parson or two in sombre garments, were gathered together under this clump of trees, to see the great match of the season, that between Hill-

ford and Burley. It was the return match. The first had been played at Burley, and resulted in an easy victory for the Burleians, who had vaunted their success in a manner very trying to the Hillfordian temper. The defeated side had, therefore, upon this occasion, mustered their strongest team, fully determined to give their adversaries a sound drubbing, and spoil their crowing for the future.

Amidst the group under the trees sat Henrietta Thane, superb as ever, while over the back of her chair leaned her cousin Oswald, his face glowing with happiness. He was at last an expectant bridegroom, his marriage with Henrietta being fixed for next month. His capricious mistress had returned from Paris in a most amiable mood, and when, emboldened by her gracious manner, he had renewed his suit, she accepted him with charming frankness. How much the fact of her having passed her twenty-seventh birthday had to do with her sudden capitulation

Oswald did not ask ; he had achieved what he had so long and earnestly desired, and was for the time satisfied.

At Henrietta's feet lay Lux Garland, awaiting a call from the captain of the day. Lux had been captain of the club for some years, but this season he had been unable to play, and the most efficient cricketers had, one after another, acted the part. To-day, Geoffrey Thane was the commander. This was the first game Lux had played since his illness, and he had begged, when he found how utterly tired he was after fielding, not to be called to the wicket until the last. He still looked fragile, though he called himself well ; and responded in his old bantering tone to his sister's anxious questions as to how he felt.

Daphne was sitting beside Mr. Merriman, making heroic efforts to talk to him and interest him in the game, so familiar to her, so little understood by him. She had been accustomed to play cricket with the children in times past, and even now occasionally took

a turn at bowling, besides always going to the matches when Lux made one of the eleven. Naturally enough, cricket terms rose to her lips; she talked in a discriminating way about “twisters,” “lobs,” and “leg-balls”; she spoke scornfully of “spooning” and “sky-ing”; and when the Burleians were in, had praised Stephen Carr’s splendid “long-stopping” with the air of an old *habituée* of Lord’s. Her companion had never cared for games and sports when a boy; therefore to abjure them had cost him no pang. It is hardly worth while to inquire whether, had he taken more kindly to bodily, he might have been more capable of mental, exercise; certainly he had no liking now for either. There is something both sublime and ridiculous in the forsaking, by the manly cleric, of his healthful, if not necessary, exercise, in deference to the opinion of a tyrannical religious world—a world so fatuous as to strain painfully over a diminutive gnat, while it swallows many a camel, hump and all.



Of course Mr. Merriman, finding himself beside a pretty girl, feigned an interest in her conversation ; but he feigned, as he did everything, very feebly, and so only appeared bored. Daphne perceived this, and, disgusted with his lack of spirit, directed her talk to Hector, who lay extended on the grass beside his brother, trying to imitate his hero's scoffing remarks on the impending defeat of the Hillfordians. Hector had far more sympathy with his sister's fears than with his brother's indifference ; but then to lament was girlish, while to scoff was manly, and he tried hard to simulate a *nonchalance* he did not feel.

Hillford was, in fact, getting very much the worst of it, and seemed on the point of losing the game. Burley had won the toss, and, inspired by their luck, had gone in for a hard fight. Two steady bats were chosen for the first players, and they remained over an hour at the wickets, tiring out the enemy's best bowlers. It was to no purpose that the Hillford captain changed his men. In vain did

Lux Garland bowl his tremendous paced, round-arm balls; in vain did Stephen Carr try his true under-arm bowling; the batsmen knocked both about in fine style, and seemed likely to stay in all day, when one, adventuring a very risky run, ran his companion out. But the Burleian spirit was aroused, and each man in his turn played with a certain amount of dash, that to-day was effective even when imprudent.

“Luck’s a lord!” cried Mike Hoare, a lean, disjointed-looking man, who moved in a jerky manner. Mike had a shrill voice, befitting the longest tongue in Hillford, and sat now among a group of local wiseacres near the cricketers’ tent. The cause of Mike’s ejaculation was the failure of Captain Mildmay in catching a ball, which the crack Burley batsman hit into his very hands.

“Butter fingers!” cried Mike’s companion; but he shook his head, and declared—“It was the luck that did it.”

In the end, Burley went out for one

hundred and fifty-eight runs, having kept the wickets for five hours, and wearied out the other side. The Hillford captain decided on sending in his two best men, especially as they had done very little bowling, so Captain Mildmay and Bob Purton were ordered to the wickets. The former was a brilliant bat, and played in the county eleven, while Purton, the carpenter, was a steady run-getter, who had won the club bat last season. Their side depended greatly on these two. What, then, were the feelings of the men of Hillford in general, when Captain Mildmay was given out "leg before wicket" for ten, and Bob Purton spooned a ball into the point's hands, and went out with a duck's egg? Ill fortune followed; three more wickets went down with the score at eighteen. In an almost despairing mood, Geoffrey himself came in; yet, though depressed, he intended to make a stand, and at any rate not to go out so quickly as his predecessors. He played steadily for some time, not attempting run-

getting, when the man at the other wicket was caught, making six men out for twenty-five.

“Send in Stephen Carr!” shouted Geoffrey.

Looser-jointed, and thinner than ever, Stephen came from the tent. There was a look of dogged determination on his face, which boded ill to the Burleians, and when he took his stand at the wicket and began to play in the same steady manner as Geoffrey, the bowlers felt they must alter their tactics. It seemed at first as if the two men were prepared to stay in until nightfall, without getting a single run, for half a dozen maiden “overs” were bowled; but then, Geoffrey commenced hitting for ones, that shortly became twos, and after a few of these he grew inspired. The genius of the game took possession of him. His dark eyes shone, his square figure became glorious. The Hillfordians watched each ball with an anxiety which became more and more intense; each successful hit was vehemently applauded, and

when he sent a "leg-ball" splendidly away, the cheering was absolutely frantic.

"Run it out!" "Hurrah!" "Bravo, our side!" "Well done, Geoff!" "Keep it up, sir!" were the notes of admiration and exhortation addressed to the hero of the day by cricketers and spectators. Even the less interested of the ladies under the elms grew excited. Henrietta turned away from Oswald to watch his brother; the stately Misses Mildmay actually clapped their hands; while Daphne forgot the very existence of the Rev. Percival, and rejoiced in the prowess of her rejected lover.

The day was exquisite. Across the broad afternoon glare came a tender, south-westerly breeze, balmy with the scent of wild thyme, caressing the mossy elm trees, kissing the ladies' cheeks, and cooling the faces of the fevered cricketers. The sun sank lower, the white light became golden, touching the dark foliage with a spring-tide glow, brightening the soiled grass with the freshness of May.

A great clapping of hands and shouting from the opposite side proclaimed that Stephen Carr had been bowled. He had been regarded principally as the backer-up of Geoffrey; still, he had got twenty-four runs, and had been difficult to get out; so the rejoicing was not without cause. Another man went in, but was bowled immediately.

“Lux Garland!” shouted Geoffrey. So, though he was not the last man, Lux fastened on his pads and seized his bat.

The batting of the Oxonian was stylish in the extreme, matching Captain Mildmay’s rather than Geoffrey Thane’s. In about ten minutes he had made eighteen runs, and then came out ignominiously by hitting the ball on his own wicket. He returned to his former position at Henrietta’s feet, merely remarking to Oswald that the ground was “devilish lively.” The eleventh man went in, got a few runs, and was bowled, Geoffrey the while remaining firm as a rock at the wicket; and in the end bringing out his bat



for ninety-six. Ecstatic applause resounded from all parts of the field as he walked slowly towards the tent, with a step of conscious triumph.

Alexander, after Arbela, very probably did not feel so elated as Geoffrey to-day. He had been successful in the one sport he loved ; he was the theme of everybody's talk ; moreover, he had won his laurels in the presence of the girl who had refused him. She must admire his good play, for she understood all about cricketing, and perhaps she would repent her decision. Let her repent ever so much, she would not be asked to decide again. Geoffrey was entirely certain on that point ; he was not a man to humble himself to any woman, however much he might care for her ; his self-esteem had been too sorely wounded for him to run the risk of a second blow.

From the cricketers in the tent and the cricket lovers around, Geoffrey, after a little while, escaped to the group under the elms.

"Ninety-six, not out !" said Lux to Daphne,

as the victor approached them. "Only fancy what we shall have to endure! He was always famous at relating his exploits in the noble game, and now he will be simply terrible. I shall go out for a few weeks; the Mildmays have asked me to stay with them."

Daphne shook her head reprovingly at Lux. It did not please her to hear Geoffrey laughed at. True, she had often laughed at him herself in past times, but that was before he had proposed to her; since then, she had felt for him the special tenderness such girls as she always feel for their rejected lovers.

The compliments paid to Geoffrey by his own friends, if not so loud and broad as those he had received from the townsfolk, were warm and flattering enough. The ladies congratulated him on his play, and themselves on having seen it, with peculiarly feminine grace; while the men declared that the way in which he saved the game was worthy of Bails, chief bat of the university eleven.

Geoffrey stood before them, smiling quite radiantly, and looking marvellously like his handsome brother. He was perfectly happy ; happier than Oswald, and with good cause, for was not his achievement greater ? Any man may win a wife, but how many can get “ ninety-six runs, not out ” ?

“ I am sorry I have neither olive nor parsley with which to wreath your brows, Geoff,” said Lux.

“ There’s some hemlock in the ditch over there, and hemlock is very much like parsley, only it smells nasty,” ventured Hector, emboldened by the satirical tone of his brother’s speech.

“ Hemlock ! by all the gods ! What a proposal ! Geoff was never so far from desiring hemlock in all his life,” retorted Lux.

“ What a horrid nuisance it was your knocking down that wicket just as I thought you were well in ! ” observed Geoffrey, slipping rather stiffly down on

the grass beside Lux. "How did you do it? I did not see exactly, but I was awfully put out, for I thought myself safe for a hundred."

"It was like my efforts in general—abortive," answered Lux, gloomily.

"If you had got a hundred, you would have been put into 'Lillywhite,'" said Hector, almost overpowered with the thought of so much honour being nearly attained by a man he in his boyish heart despised.

"Very likely Geoffrey will be put into 'Lillywhite' next match," said Daphne, smiling a little at the young man, who was looking up at her from the grass.

"That he won't. He'll never have such luck again. It was all a fluke this time," muttered Hector.

In terror lest Geoffrey should hear the boy's unflattering remarks, Daphne began talking to the successful cricketer. There was at first a shade of embarrassment in her manner, caused by her fear of how he would

receive her attempt at conversation ; but that passed away immediately he responded to her words in his old friendly style. Geoffrey was satisfied with himself to so great a degree, that his satisfaction overflowed on the world in general, including even the girl who had given him the greatest cause for dissatisfaction. He had avoided going to the Croft for some time, but when the return match between Burley and Hillford was coming off, he felt it would be weak to give up the chance of getting Lux to play, from fear of meeting Daphne. Therefore, although he had by no means recovered from the smart of his rejection, he went down to call.

All the Garlands, little and big, were assembled under the chestnut tree ; and Geoffrey, feeling more at ease in the presence of numbers than he would have done if called on to encounter Daphne, either alone or only with her mother, went forward and shook hands with the conscious girl. The awkwardness of both was very evident,

especially when she made little spasmodic attempts at conversation with him, and was answered in a curt and offended way. It was, then, with a great sense of relief she found he had to-day lapsed into the half-familiar, half-patronizing manner of yore; and she responded to his words as gaily and carelessly as if such a thing as love had never been mentioned between them. It struck her the while as very strange how entirely they were able to ignore the past, and talk about cricket. It was not, of course, at all strange; but Daphne was an ignorant child, and did not know how, in this world of ours, the commonplace steps perpetually on the skirts of romance, just as comedy for ever treads on the heels of tragedy.

In the highest spirits, the Hillfordians, both players and spectators, set their faces homewards; while the Burleians, "taken down a notch or two," as Mike Hoare expressed it, went up to the Pelican, in search of the lumbering waggonette by



which they would return sadly to their town.

"How funnily you walk, Lux!" said Hector, who, as usual, kept close beside his brother. "You look like Virgil's doll with half the sawdust dropped out."

"I feel like it, too," said Lux, wearily, leaning against the field gate. "I was a fool to play."

"Surely we might get some sort of conveyance from the little inn by the bridge," said Henrietta, turning from Oswald, and regarding the cricketer with sympathy.

Daphne seized her brother's arm, as if she feared he would faint.

"I will run to the Lamb," cried Geoffrey, moved, in spite of himself, by the dumb anxiety in Daphne's face; "no doubt I can get a trap there."

"I believe I can manage to walk," said Lux, recovering himself a little. "Here comes Stephen Carr; he will drag me home. Steeve, give me your arm."

Stephen was just passing the group when Lux called to him; he came instantly, and with some difficulty pulled off his cricketing cap to the ladies; then he gave Lux his arm. They continued their way with slow steps, Henrietta and Oswald in front, Daphne on her brother's left hand, and Geoffrey with Hector behind.

"Why did not Phœbe come to-day?" asked Lux, presently.

"She has gone to our aunt's, at Froxford; she went last month. I sent her there because she wasn't well, and this month I hope to send her to the sea-side."

"Is she any better, Stephen?" asked Daphne, kindly.

"I think she is a little stronger, thank you, Miss Daphne. I was over at Froxford last week, and she certainly seemed more like herself," replied Stephen.

"She looked very pale and thin when I saw her last; I really thought she was going to be ill. I am so glad you sent her

away for change," said Daphne, recalling, with a sensation of pain, the girl's weary, pinched face. Her own suffering had not harmed her yet. No, it had but made her more tender over the sufferings of others, even though those might only be bodily ailments.

Oswald Thane, stopping to open the second field gate for the party, heard Daphne's words. A twinge of remorse touched him. Was the poor little thing grieving for him? For the first time in his life he regretted having won a woman's heart. By the light of his own content, he faintly perceived the darkness of her despair. A shadow came on his face, but it was quickly chased away by a gay smile, as Henrietta's silvery voice sounded in his ears. What room was there for thought of the beggar-maid in the presence of his beautiful, his adored princess?

## CHAPTER II.

### HARVEST HOME.

“Come Health! come Jollity! light-footed, come!  
Here hold your revels, and make this your home!”

*The Farmer's Boy.*

FARMER BILLINGTON'S harvest home was regarded by the whole hamlet of Oakwood as the year's great event; it was the Oakwood season compressed into one day—a banquet, a concert, and a ball all together. Naturally it caused a good deal of excitement; as much, indeed, as the oddly inexcitable, bucolic mind is capable of feeling; and naturally, too, this excitement showed itself in the preparation of festive attire by the expectant guests. The young men bought brilliant ties, put smart ribbons round their “billycocks,” and took

out the many-hued waistcoats which usually lay at the bottom of their boxes, carefully folded in large check handkerchiefs. The older men adorned themselves in the whitest and longest of smock-frocks, while on their heads they wore tall, black hats, which had once been Mr. Billington's. The farmer was very particular about his Sunday hats, and directly they lost their first glossiness he bestowed them on his labourers. The effect was not, of course, equally good in all cases; for though they fitted a few, some they extinguished altogether, while upon the heads of others they rested in a perilous and insecure fashion. The wives of these black-and-white gentlemen very much eclipsed their spouses in colour, after the manner of female bipeds without feathers, who, in this respect, differ amazingly from their cousins in feathers—these latter being content with the most sombre attire, whilst their lords disport themselves in prismatic robes. On this occasion the ladies wore their best print

dresses, starched so stiffly that they rustled at every step; completing their toilettes by the addition of the gayest little shawls and caps. The girls donned their new summer dresses, plaited their hair and tied it up with ribbons, certain, every one of them, that their pains would not be thrown away upon their rustic sweethearts.

At the back of the Grange, under the splendid old chestnut trees, the feast was spread, for it was a glorious day, and the Grange servants preferred to set the dinner here when the weather permitted, both because the place was so near the kitchen door, and because they liked to reserve the barn, which was always decked with flowers and lighted with lamps, for the evening's dancing. Three long tables accommodated the dinner guests; at the head of the first sat the mistress, at the second the master, and at the third James Hannay, the bailiff. Great was the clattering of plates, and marvellous was the rapid disappearance of

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the viands on the plates. Beef and mutton, veal and bacon, puddings and pies, vanished in quite an alarming way; and no wonder, when some of the men confessed they had starved themselves for a few days in order the more to enjoy the feast, and one man was popularly supposed to eat enough at harvest home to last him until Christmas-Day. The movement of tongues by no means kept pace with that of teeth, for at this early stage of the proceedings their owners were much in awe of "master, missus, and their foine friends." Particularly were they impressed by the mistress's dignity, as she presided at the principal table, in her shaded silk dress. There was no lingering over any course, no toying with the food; they ate as those who but twice a year eat as heartily as they desire, and at the expense of another. This harvest home dinner and the Christmas dinner were the two dinners of the year to them. Conversation! Who would care to talk, with meat of Mr. Billington's fattening and the Grange

cook's dressing before him, unless it were to praise the producer and the preparer thereof? The latter, indeed, was the heroine of the day, and quite monopolized the compliments of the company. "Hanner allus does her meat to a turn;" "Hanner's pie-crust is as light as a feather;" "There's no plum-pudden' like Hanner's;" and such like remarks were to be heard on all sides.

The only guests who ventured to discuss anything except the dishes, were a few girls who were home from service; it was extraordinary how many of the Oakwood girls were home from service at harvest home. These visitors were used to good meals, and could consequently afford to whisper and giggle together, and to encourage their more bashful swains to outspoken flattery or repartee.

"Never mind, Nancy," said the farmer to a rosy-cheeked girl, who was trying to extract conversation from a fair, freckled, shame-faced youth. "Never mind. Jem likes to hear you talk, if he can't talk hisself."

"Law, sir, he don't say nothin' but 'Yes' and 'No,'" answered Nancy, her eyes sparkling mischievously.

"He means well, but he isn't as quick as you, Nancy. You'd be half through the Marriage Service before he had twisted his tongue to begin."

Both lad and lass blushed, he looking sheepishly out of the corners of his eyes at her, she muttering something about "never going through the Marriage Service with he."

When at length the most energetic diners could exert themselves no more, the health of the master and mistress was drunk in this wise: the whole company rose, filled their mugs with ale, and sang the following toast:—

"Here's a health unto our master, the founder of this feast ;  
I hope to God with all my heart his soul in heaven may  
rest ;

That all his works may prosper, whate'er he takes in hand ;  
For we are all his servants, and all at his command.

*Chorus*—So drink, boys, drink, and see that you do not  
spill.

For if you do, you must drink two, with a hearty,  
free good will."

The same ceremony was gone through in honour of the mistress, with the substitution of the feminine pronoun, and then the guests dispersed to play their favourite games.

Early in the afternoon came the Croft children, with Lux and Daphne. Later on came Mr. Evelyn, who had just returned from his stay in the South of France with his beloved nephews ; and still later came Stephen Carr.

Then clothes-baskets full of cake, and watering-pots full of tea, were borne out into the orchard, where all the children in Oakwood were assembled. It was a grand occasion for the young Garlands. Hector and Julius climbed up the quarrenden tree, and pelted the delighted children with large apples from its boughs. Virgilia took upon herself to dispense the tea, and filled, with proud satisfaction, several of the mugs held out to her, when suddenly she tripped over an old cherry tree root, and spilled the brown liquid all over her white frock ; whereupon

she was put in the swing by one of the Grange servants, and swung until she was dry, a process she greatly approved.

Directly tea was over, the children rushed to various games—"Oranges and Lemons," "Mulberry Bush," "Fox and Goose," etc. In this latter game, Daphne distinguished herself as a most agile and wily "fox," making quick havock among the goose's brood, until, the last being captured, she came and sat down on the grass beside Lux, and contemplated the cheerful scene before her.

The Grange orchard bordered the flower garden to the south-west, sloping gently down into a broad copse-edged meadow. Neither the house nor the garden commanded any view of the Aire valley, being set in a little hollow on the south of Oakwood Hill. The surrounding fields and woods made all the landscape, giving a certain sweet isolation to the quaint old dwelling, which, with its deep porch, latticed windows, and many gables, looked a very "home of ancient peace."

In the orchard, the children were swinging and playing merry games, with much talk and laughter. In the meadow beyond, the men were busily engaged at skittles and cricket; their cheery shouts came on the ear, softened by distance. Under the bowery honeysuckle sat Mr. and Mrs. Billington, with the vicar, while the house servants and village girls flitted about the scene. The light grew lower and more golden, the trees cast longer shadows, a faint mist hung over the copse. Daphne's gaze, at first interested, became dreamy. She saw the vicar rise and stroll among the groups of children, saw him pat the curly heads and smile down on the flushed faces, saw him pass into the meadow and talk to the skittle players and cricketers. Any other parson would have made a speech on such an occasion; Mr. Evelyn abhorred speech-making, and gladly took advantage of the scattered state of his Oakwood flock to address a few pleasant words to individuals, after which he bade farewell to

the master and mistress, and departed. Still Daphne gazed on at the bright foreground and the soft distance. For ever the scene remained painted on her mind. It was the last time she looked at Nature in entire, unquestioning delight.

She was aroused from her wrapt contemplation by the coming of Stephen from the cricket field, where he had been bowling to the young men.

"Is it not a pretty sight, Miss Daphne?" he said, his voice insensibly becoming tender as his eyes.

"Yes, indeed, it is quite Arcadian," returned Daphne.

"If the farmer gives them too much beer, it will not be very Arcadian. And that huge can has travelled out to the men appallingly often," observed Lux.

"It's home-brewed, Mr. Lux, it's home-brewed; so it won't do 'em any harm;" said the farmer, coming up to the trio. "Besides, their heels 'll take it out o' their heads when

they begins to dance. Come, let's see if the barn's lighted up."

The barn was found to be lighted, and the old fiddler from Froxford to be tuning his instrument, while already several couples had taken their places for a country dance.

"You dance with Stephen, and I will take pretty Nancy," said Lux to his sister.

Daphne smiled, and put her hand on Stephen's arm. They joined the dancers, and the figure began. The young man had never touched the maiden's hand since the day after he had rescued her from drowning ; and now, as she gave it him, a thrill went through his own. He had been more than human to have remained unmoved ; yet his strong will revolted from the emotion he felt, and, as he had ever done on such occasions, he set resolutely before himself the fact of his social inferiority to the girl he loved. It was with some of the old bitterness he recalled it now, and a mad wish arose in his heart that it were possible to bear her away to a desert island,



where the fatal distinctions of life had no existence, and where, entrusted to his love and honour, she might learn the might and purity of both. Through the oft-repeated figure of the country dance he so meditated, gazing at his partner in an abstracted way, that might have made her uneasy if she had not been too amused in watching the various dancers to pay much attention to the man opposite her.

The dance was stately and slow, in honour of the gentlefolks who were taking part in it; especially was the dignity of the mistress considered. Mrs. Billington had chosen the bailiff, while the farmer took the bailiff's wife, and thus all due honour was done to the guests. It must be confessed the lads and lasses experienced a sense of relief when this rather solemn prelude was over. After it the dancing grew very lively and occasionally rough, but being judiciously tempered with singing, had no chance of becoming too furious.

The singing is very difficult of description

to those who know nothing of rustic melody, because musical terms are inadequate to give a correct idea of it. Like all untaught vocalization, it was always in a minor key. Mirth or jollity in it there was none. It seemed as if the singers were holding a sort of suppressed wake, the passion and tears being disallowed. The men effected a compromise between howling and talking, the women between shrieking and whispering. It is a curious fact that here in England uncultivated singing is almost invariably distressing or ludicrous, and that no creatures sing sweetly by nature except the birds.

The first song of the evening was sung by the head carter. It consisted of about twenty verses; the latter half of each verse was repeated by the whole company in chorus, lengthening out the performance in a very depressing style.

Then a younger and brisker man sang a song, in which this highly approved sentiment occurred—

“There’s wranglin’ and janglin’,  
Their minds is always changin’,  
A-lookin’ for some pretty gal what’s new.”

A great deal of laughter and applause followed this song, especially from the women ; while one audacious young man tried to stem the tide of feminine satire by observing that “he thought the gals a deal more fickle-hearted than the men.”

Then Lux was called on to sing, and gave “Old Simon the Cellarer,” which was much applauded, but did not afford such intense satisfaction to the rustics as did the singing of one of themselves. “He’s all very well, he is ; but he don’t spit it out like our Bill,” was the verdict of Bill’s comrades.

It was past eight o’clock when Daphne, having at length succeeded in gathering her charges together, stepped out of the rustic ball-room into the moonlight.

“You are not thinking of going yet, Miss Daphne ? Why, the children have not had any supper !” remonstrated Mrs. Billington.

"Yes, please, Mrs. Billington," said Daphne with a smile. "You know Miss Thane is to be married to-morrow, and I am going to be one of her bridesmaids, so I must go to bed early to be ready for the day."

"To be sure ; to be sure. Young ladies don't get married every day," responded the good woman. "I shall be there to see how you look."

Daphne did not wait for more, but set off at a great pace down the hill, the children chasing her. Through the wood they kept up their speed until they emerged on the field path, where they paused a moment to look at the round, red moon, just rising over the dip in the south-eastern hill. Its orange light touched the tree tops, but left the valley in darkness. On the open hill-side, however, it was light enough, and not until they crossed the canal and came to the river-side were there any shadows. As they neared the tall willows, they saw the figure of a man pass rapidly along beneath the

trees; but though he went on towards Airecliff without turning his head, they all recognized him.

“There is the expectant bridegroom!” said Daphne, half to herself. “He must have been to pay a last visit to Henrietta, and is walking back to Ashfield. I know he is staying there until the wedding.”

“I can’t think why he should go to see Henrietta now,” said Hector, in disgust. “He’ll soon see enough of her, and she’ll see too much of him.”

Daphne laughed at Hector’s speech, but her laugh suddenly ended in a smothered cry of fright; for, almost hidden in an alder clump, stood a white woman’s form. At Daphne’s cry the ghostly apparition moved, and came slowly from the tree.

“Oh, Phœbe! how you frightened me!” exclaimed Daphne, smiling at her own alarm, as she took Phœbe’s hand. “But really, you looked like a ghost in the moonlight,” she continued in a whisper, that the children might not hear.

"I came out for a walk," said Phœbe, in a low voice.

"Are you going to meet Stephen? I don't think he will be coming away from the Grange yet."

"No. Yes. I don't know," said Phœbe, hesitating strangely.

"But, Phœbe, I thought you were at Froxford. I am sure Stephen told me so."

"I came home to-day," said the girl, in a faint voice.

"You are tired. Come back with us," said Daphne, kindly. "It is too damp to stand about in this grass; and you may have to walk quite up to Oakwood to meet Stephen. Come home with us, and I will show you my bridesmaid's dress; it is so pretty. You know Miss Thane is going to be married to-morrow."

Phœbe turned with a sudden start from Daphne's persuasive face, and gazed along the Airecliff path, but, as she turned, Daphne saw her face was ghastly in the moonlight.

"You are ill, Phœbe. Come home with us," she urged, taking the shrinking girl's hand.

"Come along, Phœbe; don't bother about it any longer. There's the church clock striking nine," cried Hector, impatiently.

"No, thank you, Miss Daphne; I will go and meet Stephen," said Phœbe, hurriedly; and, pulling her hand from Daphne's grasp, she went with quick steps on by the river-side.

The shouts of the harvest revellers, mingling with the striking of the clock, came on the evening air.

"I wish I had made her come. She looks so tired and ill," said Daphne to Hector, as the white figure passed out of sight, and the Croft party went on their homeward way.

The moon had risen high in heaven, changing its orange tint to silver, and flooding the valley with light. Instead of a confused mass of foliage, the trees showed themselves distinctly, casting sharp shadows

on the grass; the meadows were white with dew, the air heavy with silence, for the last shout of "harvest home!" had died away, and all was still, save when at rare intervals a dreamy sheep-bell faintly sounded, or a bird, mistaking the broad moonlight for day, fluttered on his bough and gurgled a few soft notes.

Lux and Stephen had chosen to return by the Airecliff road, avoiding the woods and meadows, which the former feared as being damp. Arrived at the weir, they loitered, paused in their talk, and gazed at the beauty around them.

"It is very lovely," said Stephen, presently. "Looking at it, one might almost forget the existence of sin and suffering. The earth is holy and at rest in the moonlight."

"The devil's in the moon for mischief," said Lux, mockingly; then in a grave voice, "I beg your pardon, Steeve, for quoting the prince of scoffers, but the words were out before I knew. If you like, I'll give you



‘On such a night as this,’ to make up for the discordant note I uttered.”

Stephen did not seem to heed; he bent over the woodwork of the weir, and gazed abstractedly into the water.

“Pray don’t stare at the moon in the water like that, Steeve. Do you know it is horribly dangerous to do so? There is a strange fascination about it, and presently you will be drawn by it to plunge headlong into the river.”

“And if I did, would it not be a pleasant death?” asked Stephen, lightly. “One would rest well on the Aire’s calm mother-like bosom, rocked to sleep by the slumbrous flow of the water over the weir, detained by which, one would remain here in the smiling valley for ever.”

“The gods have made thee poetical, Steeve. Now *I* contemplate the possibility from a practical point of view. If you plunge in, I shall be compelled to plunge after you, and so get my clothes wet—a nasty sensation.

I could not very well leave you to drown close to the very spot where you saved my little Daphne. Ah! Steeve, you have not lived in vain."

Into the young man's eyes came the glow which the mention of her name always brought; but he crushed his weakness, and, turning from the weir, he stood erect. "There was a time when the reason of my existence was a riddle I could not solve. I have solved it now. I am sent to work among the people. This is the purpose of my life, and this purpose holds and grows. In spite of gnawing discontent, and unsatisfied desire, I am certain life is good. Its value is not in proportion to the happiness or misery it confers on me, but is to be measured by the need others have of me." As Stephen spoke, his face was transfigured by a noble emotion; and Lux, gazing at it, thought it the face of some strong pitying angel.

"I have often laughed at your craze," said

he, laying his hand on Stephen's shoulder. "But in my soul I believe it to be, of a truth, the divine afflatus."

After this they were silent; and, crossing the weir, they turned from the calm, shining river, and took the Hillford road, neither dreaming how the aspect of the silver Aire that night would haunt their memories for ever.

## CHAPTER III.

### BELLS.

“ And all went merry as a marriage-bell ;  
But hush ! hark ! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell ! ”  
*Childe Harold*, Canto III. 21.

AT an early hour on the following day the church bells rang merrily out. They rang as if they had never before rung on so happy a day, and never expected to ring on such again. There was a jubilation in their notes, unheard in ordinary cases. They seemed aware of the magnitude of the occasion, and pealed forth a passionate epithalamium to celebrate the marriage of the handsomest pair in the county. The sunny air vibrated with their song. A wedding with the sun shining ! Do not these words express the

acme of earth's brightness? When Eros is crowned by Hymen, and Apollo smiles, is not the height of mortal gladness reached? Have the gods anything better to bestow upon their children?

Attracted by the song of the bells, groups of factory men and girls, in their Sunday clothes, assembled in the church and churchyard long before the time appointed for the wedding. The Thaneleigh "hands" had a whole holiday, and were invited to partake of a feast in honour of the young master's marriage; consequently, they were in the highest good humour with themselves and their employers.

Great arches of evergreens, with appropriate mottoes, had been erected on the route from Thaneleigh to the church; and the church itself was gay with autumn flowers, which gave the crowd something to examine and admire during their long period of waiting. At length, just as they began to grow impatient, they were gratified by the

arrival of the bridegroom, who, with his brother, and his very intimate friend, Vincent Selous, came from Ashfield in the Selous' carriage. A buzz of satisfaction went through the churchyard as Oswald dismounted and walked slowly along the pathway. He looked far more self-possessed than is usual with bridegrooms; but that was perhaps owing to his superb physique. The only traces of nervousness in his manner were in the uneasy glances he cast at the crowd, both without and within the church; moreover, when he reached the chancel he turned at once into the vestry, as if disliking to be the object of so much scrutiny.

Soon after his coming the wedding guests began to arrive. Interested-looking ladies, bored-looking men, and finally, the bridesmaids, fair and fresh in their white robes. Among these, Daphne bore the laurel, as was meet. When she came along the path with her free step and nymph-like grace, she appeared a very counterpart of her name-

sake when the sun-god's eye first rested on her.

The bridesmaids remained in the porch, awaiting the bride. In a few minutes the Thaneleigh carriage drew up at the church-yard gate, and Henrietta, with her uncle, alighted. There was a hush among the crowd, as she passed to the church—a hush succeeded by expressions of profound admiration. The sun shone brilliantly on her white satin and pearls; but even the dress-loving factory girls could hardly spare time from the contemplation of her beauty to look at her attire. She had often been as beautiful, but never so lovely as to-day. The haughtiness of her face had melted into a softness, which gave her an indescribable charm. The queen had become a woman, and was content with the metamorphosis. Oswald came down the chancel to meet her. One glance at her face, and his own glowed with rapture, the uneasiness faded from his eyes, he was doubtful no longer.

Mr. Evelyn's still sonorous voice rang impressively through the church. He was effective in the Marriage Service, always giving it with a solemnity which was somewhat appalling. Lux said he struck the exact medium between horror and pity—horror at his own part in the sacrifice, pity for the victims. After the exhortation, "I require and charge you both," he made the usual slight pause; and at this moment a loud noise resounded in the nave, causing the bridegroom to start violently, and turn very pale. The noise was occasioned by the fall of a small boy from a high window, whither he had climbed to get a good view of the ceremony, and the vicar, taking no notice of the commotion, went on with the service to the final "amazement."

As the newly married pair came down the aisle and passed into the churchyard, they were declared by the spectators to be the best-matched couple ever seen.

The bells pealed, the crowd cheered, the



sun shone ; and Oswald, hat in hand, walked proudly down the flower-strewn path, his beautiful bride on his arm.

No sooner had the wedding party driven off, than the whole of the Thaneleigh work-people trooped up the hill, joyfully anticipating the feast of which they were to partake. On the broad lawn to the south-east of the house a huge tent was pitched, and here the people's banquet was spread. With smiling faces they gathered round the loaded tables, eager to fall upon the tempting food, when they were called on to wait a few moments for the arrival of Stephen Carr, who, as Mr. Thane's representative, was to take the head of the principal table. There was some grumbling at the delay, especially when half an hour passed and still he had not come.

It appeared from the talk of the guests that he had not been seen the whole morning. There was nothing strange in his absence from the church, for men did not care to see weddings, as women did ; but where could he

be now? His non-arrival was a serious matter, with some hundreds of keen appetites waiting with the utmost impatience to commence the long-desired feast.

A messenger had been despatched to the factory and the cottage on Tory, in search of the absent manager. He, being light of foot, returned more quickly than could have been hoped, but he only brought word that he could find Mr. Carr nowhere; the factory was empty; the cottage on Tory locked up and deserted. Then Mr. Thane was appealed to. He at once decided to proceed with the banquet, with the under-manager in the chair, and at last the people, a little put out by their long waiting, sat down to eat, when good cheer soon restored good humour.

Meanwhile, within doors the wedding breakfast went merrily forward. The great dining-room, with its wood-carving and painted windows, had not, even in the days of its occupancy by old knights and barons, held a fairer company; nor had it ever seen

so handsome a bridal pair. In their superb youth and beauty, they might have challenged the shades of all past brides and bridegrooms who had together sat at the head of the table in the Thaneleigh dining-hall.

Oswald was now entirely at ease; the morning's shade of disquiet had passed away, and, radiant with happiness, he now murmured a few words to his bride, now talked gaily to his nearest neighbours, making in the end so brilliant a speech as to astonish even his father, whose belief in the powers of his elder son was as strong as his pride in his beauty. As to Henrietta, no possible situation could have embarrassed her; she therefore displayed none of the bashfulness pretty in a very young bride, but ludicrous in one more mature, and was her own graceful, charming self. Mr. Evelyn himself, in proposing the toast of the occasion, frankly confessed that she eclipsed the beauties of his youth.

The time flew by, until Oswald, looking at his watch, held it before Henrietta. "If we lose

the four o'clock train, we shall be obliged to stay in town, instead of going on to Dover," he said, anxiously.

"And it is a quarter to three now; surely we have enough time. Going out to the people will not take long, and then there is only to dress," replied Henrietta, smiling back at him.

"We must go out at once, then," said he, rising from the table.

The appearance of the bridal pair, with the bridesmaids and guests, upon the lawn, was hailed by loud cheers. The work-people clustered round, leaving in haste the remnants of their feast. The women had now plenty of opportunity to comment on the flow of the bride's white satin dress, the sparkle of her diamond rings, the subdued light of her pearl necklace, and the length of her veil, while the men were able to admire their young mistress's form and face.

In few words, Oswald thanked them for their presence, making a better impression on

them than he had ever done in his life before. Mr. Thane, beaming with delight, succeeded his son, and was, as usual, enthusiastically applauded.

The wedding party, the gaily dressed factory girls, the flower-beds on the southern slope of the lawn, and the many flags round the tent, made altogether a splendid bit of colouring under the soft September sun ; while the people's shouts and the pealing of the distant bells, added the pleasure of hearing to that of seeing. Suddenly the bells stopped, and by some mysterious sympathy the people ceased shouting. There was a moment's silence, and then the lowest bell of the eight, the deep-toned knell, boomed out two solemn strokes. Heavily they fell upon the listening air. A shudder went through the crowd ; but their entertainers did not heed the sound.

"Did Stephen come?" asked Mr. Thane of the under-manager, who was standing close to the master.

"No, sir ; we've seen nothing of him. Nobody can tell where he has gone. All I can say is, the loss is his own," returned the man, cheerfully.

The bride and bridegroom, with Mr. Thane, had just returned to the house, when up the carriage drive came, at a furious pace, a small dog-cart, wherein sat Stephen Carr and the Hillford sergeant of police.

The latter, who was driving, stopped his horse with a sudden jerk, a few yards from the crowd, and the two men dismounted. Every eye was turned upon them ; even the wedding guests, with the exception of the bridesmaids, who had followed the bride into the house, stood and gazed at them.

"Where have you been, Mr. Carr ?" "The dinner's all gone ;" "What's the matter, Steeve ?" called out one workman after another.

Stephen took no heed, but walked with uncertain steps, like a drunken man, towards the hall door. The sergeant took his arm, and

led him quickly within the house, leaving the crowd without to gape and wonder.

Beside a great clump of flowers and ferns in the dim hall, stood Mr. Thane and Oswald. The white glimmer of the bridesmaids' dresses was yet on the broad staircase, as they followed the bride to her chamber.

At the entrance of the two men, Mr. Thane looked up. "What, Sergeant Perks!" said he, pleasantly. "You have come to drink the health of our newly married couple, of course? You are very welcome. But who have you got there? Why, Stephen! My dear fellow, we have been in despair at your non-arrival. What has been keeping you? Never mind now, though. Go into the dining-room; you'll find food there still; and I will send Jenkins to you."

"Sir, Mr. Thane," said Perks, hesitating strangely. "My errand is a most awkward—distressing one. I hear Mr. Oswald Thane is just setting off to the Continent, and I am obliged to ask him some questions before he goes."

“ Questions ! ” said Oswald, haughtily, coming forward a step or two.

The sight of Oswald face to face seemed to awaken Stephen from his lethargy. He strode towards him. “ Did you meet my sister beside the river last night ? ” he said, in low, distinct tones.

“ Sir, I must warn you that you are not obliged to answer that question,” interrupted the sergeant. “ Remember, whatever you say may be brought up against you.”

“ Oswald Thane,” said Stephen, unheeding the sergeant’s interruption, “ did you meet my sister by the Aire last night ? ”

Oswald returned his questioner’s look undauntedly. “ I have no reason to fear speaking,” he replied, glancing aside at the sergeant. “ I did meet your sister, Stephen, as I was going to Ashfield last night. She was walking by the river, and, recognizing her, I stopped a moment and asked her if she were coming to the wedding feast to-day. But why do you want to know ? ”



"Because she, my sister, has been found drowned at Airecliff." He spoke with a calmness awful to hear.

Oswald seized the back of a tall chair which stood near him, and held it firmly. "Good God! it cannot be true!" he said, hoarsely.

"No, no; it is not true! it is impossible! Pretty Phoebe! I can't believe it!" cried Mr. Thane, in strong emotion.

"It is true, sir," said the sergeant, chokingly, and, making a great effort, he continued, "Let us go into some private room. There's a good deal to be said as is best not heard by everybody."

Mr. Thane, utterly bewildered and distressed, led the way into his own business room, and, having closed the door, he went up to Stephen and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. "My dear boy!" he exclaimed, the tears standing in his eyes; "what can I say? I am so distressed. It is too sad, too sad!"

Stephen shook himself free from his master's touch, and again confronted Oswald.

The sergeant interposed. "Now, Mr. Carr, pray keep calm, and let me speak," remonstrated he.

"Whatever has to be said, let it be said. I have no time to waste ; in half an hour my train leaves Hillford," urged Oswald.

"Well, then, sir, what I have to ask is, will you bind yourself to appear at the inquest on the body of Phoebe Carr, which will take place to-morrow ?"

"How can I appear ?" asked Oswald, with a return to his old haughtiness. "I am just setting out on my wedding tour."

"Sir, you can manage it easy enough. To-night you'll reach London ; you'll remain there. You'll get a telegraphic message very early in the morning, to say as Mr. Thane must see you on business before you goes out of England, and so you runs down here to-morrow, with no questions asked."

"I will not do it," said Oswald.

"Surely, surely," interposed Mr. Thane, in great distress, "my son's deposition will be sufficient. Indeed, I do not understand what right you have to interfere with his movements. There are half a dozen magistrates here now, besides myself. I will set the case before them; they will answer for him."

"Sir, you don't understand; and it's very hard on me to have to tell you," said Perks. "This poor girl has been seen in the company of Mr. Oswald Thane, leastways she was seen with him last night by the side of the river, and there's suspicion that Mr. Oswald had reasons to desire her death rather than any talk in the place on his wedding day."

Mr. Thane's fine face seemed actually to wither in his terrible anxiety. "Oswald, there is nothing in this?" he cried.

"There is nothing. It is all a mistake," answered the young man, hurriedly. "But what am I to do? There is no time to lose, and Henrietta——" He ceased suddenly.

"It is easy enough," said the sergeant.

"I will go with you to town; that will save any delay. A deposition, witnesses, and those things, take time. When a lot o' beaks begins to talk, there's no end to it."

"What! go on my wedding tour in the custody of a policeman? Not for all the world," said Oswald, stubbornly.

"It is the only way to save time, sir. You have refused to return for the inquest; and I am very sorry, but it is my duty to see that you *do* return for it." Perks spoke civilly but resolutely.

At this instant there was a sharp tap at the door, and Henrietta's face, with a most inquiring expression on it, appeared.

"Uncle, Oswald, we have missed the four o'clock train, and shall miss the next, if we do not start soon. What! not changed your dress, Oswald?"

The father and son had come to the door, and stood half hiding the other two occupants of the room.

"Ha! Stephen," said Henrietta, gaily,

catching sight of the manager's face over her husband's shoulder, and nodding pleasantly to him. "You are hindering him with business, I suppose?"

Oswald shuddered in deadly terror of what Stephen might answer, and took his resolution immediately. "Yes, some very puzzling business," he said, looking away from her lustrous eyes. "But I can be spared now, and we will start at once. I hope you will not mind stopping in town for a day, because I can so easily come here from town, if my father telegraphs for me. I see no other way of acting." As he said the last words, he glanced at Sergeant Perks, as if to say, "I accept your proposal." And then taking Henrietta's hand he led her away.

"He shall not go! He shall not hide from justice in his wife's arms!" cried Stephen, wildly; and he turned to follow the retreating man.

But Perks shut the door determinedly

and stood before it. "Be a man, Mr. Carr, and control yourself. You may trust me not to lose sight of the suspected person. I want justice as much as you. But there's a deal to be done yet. You must go to the police-station, and say I have gone to London, and you must try to get further evidence. Work, Mr. Carr, work!" He laid his hand on Stephen's shoulder, and drew him from the door, motioning Mr. Thane to leave the room.

The first agony of doubt had passed from the father's heart. His son had met the accusation boldly; there was no cause for any dread; but witnesses and a lawyer must be secured. "Do everything you can to throw light on this sad accident. You cannot desire to find out the truth more than I do," he said; and giving Stephen a look of profound pity, he hurried away to confer with his son.

Amid great clapping of hands and throwing of slippers, Oswald and his wife drove from the house. No hint of the awful catas-

trophe had yet been given to the people ; nor did they dream it was aught but a matter of business when they saw the sergeant and Stephen drive away as rapidly as they had come. But Oswald, in the midst of all the rejoicing, sitting beside the woman he so passionately loved, arrived at the fruition of his desires, felt as if the chill of death were on him. The carriage went down the hill under the floral arches, and crossed the bridge. Oswald shivered. It seemed to him that the cold waters of the Aire were flowing over him.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE INQUEST.

“Past all dishonour,  
Death has left on her  
Only the beautiful.”

*The Bridge of Sighs.*

LONG before the hour appointed for the inquest on the body of the drowned girl, a knot of factory workers, both male and female, stood at the door of the Pelican inn. By degrees the knot expanded, until it became a crowd—a quiet, moody crowd, affording no employment for the two stalwart policemen at the inn door. The talking was all in a low key, even the sharpest voices taking a muffled sound. A few eager questions were asked at intervals by the new comers, but these



were asked in under-tones, and as gloomily answered. Such talking as there was had always one drift—Oswald Thane's part in the tragedy.

"I hear that precious villain has got off with his new wife," said a good-looking young man, coming up to one of the Thaneleigh "hands" who stood on the outskirts of the crowd. The new comer spoke in a tone of suppressed but bitter wrath. He was a master carpenter, and one of the most energetic Radicals in Hillford; he was, therefore, in his passionate sympathy with the people, inclined to think evil of the upper classes.

The person he addressed was a thick-set, stolid-looking individual, with a grimy visage and garments, who gazed heavily in his neighbour's face, and hesitated ere he spoke. "Yes, he's gone off; but he's got a bobby with him, as is to bring 'un back."

"He'll be committed for murder, I'm thinking," said the other.

"They've got no evidencè, man. They can't bring it home to 'un; and when you come to think on't, you can't believe he done it, and she such a pretty little thing, allus so sprack and fine, for all the world like a picter."

"Ugh! that's what's brought her to this pickle," said an ill-featured woman beside them. "She was too fine and stuck-up for the likes o' we, though she was no better than the mähn o' we, and maybe wuss."

"You hold your tongue, Mother Jowett," answered the grimy man, with more spirit than had before appeared possible in him. "I won't have her miscalled, poor little thing! and she lying dead in there."

The woman did not reply—not because she was incapable of further malice, but because at this instant a group of the principal tradespeople in the place came slowly towards the inn, and her thoughts were diverted from Phœbe to the men who should pronounce the verdict on Phœbe's death.

Quickly following the jurymen came the coroner in his carriage; then a fly drove up from the station, with a couple of unknown gentlemen; then came Dr. Drew's well-known figure. The crowd made way in silence for all, specially regarding the jurymen and Dr. Drew. The doctor's head was bent, and his usually lively eyes were cast down. He, like the brethren of the craft in general, knew more of humanity's woes and crimes than other men know; yet they grieved him still.

Some moments elapsed before there was any other arrival, and then a fly came along the road from the church, and stopped at the inn door. From it dismounted first Lux Garland and Hector, then the vicar, and last of all Daphne. The crowd could see nothing of the party, for the blinds of the carriage were down, and directly they had dismounted the four went hastily in-doors. But the policemen standing close to the door saw the vicar's troubled face, and noticed how his limbs

shook, and how Mr. Garland was obliged to leave his sister and support the parson's trembling steps.

A stir in the crowd. Farmer Billington was riding through it on his favourite mare. The farmer's rosy face was not less rosy than ever, but the expression on it had altered it nearly out of knowledge. He looked as he had only looked once before in his life—when his little Jennie was taken to the churchyard.

“Farmer,” whispered the young carpenter to him, as he slowly lifted his right leg over the mare's back, “you are on the jury; you will see justice done!”

“Hush, man! hush! you mustn't think to prejudice the jury,” replied the farmer, gravely, and hastening his movements at the sight of a carriage coming down the hill, he disappeared in the house.

“The Thaneleigh carriage! Here he comes!” muttered many voices. A sort of groan went through the crowd, which, as the carriage

drew near, changed into a hiss. The blinds were not drawn, and through the windows Mr. Thane and his two sons could be plainly seen. He was noble in presence as ever, but his lips were compressed and his eyes haggard. At sight of him the temper of the crowd changed. He had ever been the people's true, untiring friend; he would keenly feel the injury done to them, as well as his son's danger; he was to be pitied; the groans and hisses died into silence. But Oswald, hearing the wrathful sounds, sat boldly forward in the carriage, hiding his father from view. The noises again arose, increasing to a storm of yells and hoots when the carriage stopped at the inn door.

Mr. Thane got quickly out, and entered the Pelican, followed by Geoffrey, shrinking and ashamed. It was indeed a terrible ordeal for the blameless young man, that he, to whom the opinion of his fellows was of great importance, and who, moreover, hated contact with the mob, should be called

upon to figure in a scene like this! Oswald felt very differently. He had been pale and troubled until now, but when he heard the groans of the crowd, and saw angry faces peer through the carriage windows, the brute courage, so much stronger in him than in Geoffrey, arose, and, alighting from the carriage, he put the policemen aside, and stood with folded arms facing the mob. The fearless calm of his attitude, the steady gaze of his eyes, had their effect upon the people. Some felt this was not the act of a guilty man; others remembered how it was only yesterday that cheers had greeted him, and how he had been torn from his bride's arms to face this scene; others simply admired his pluck. Any way, they all ceased hooting, and suffered the undaunted Oswald to turn away and pass on in silence.

Meanwhile, within the house the coroner had placed himself at the head of the long table in the market-room; the jury had been sworn; and the man who was about to give

the first evidence—the brother of the deceased girl—stood before his fellows' pitying eyes. The sounds in the street reached them, and were understood; the jurymen looked at one another apprehensively; Stephen set his teeth and clenched his hands; the noise ceased; and the jurymen, slowly moving from the room, entered an inner and smaller chamber. There, upon a sort of improvised bier, lay a shrouded form, beside which stood Dr. Drew. As they drew near, he, with trembling hands, lifted the sheet and revealed the drowned girl. Had she known despair? There was no trace of it now. Had she felt the death agony? No mark of it remained. Sweet and calm she lay pillowed upon her fair hair, seeming almost to smile at her doom. It was hardly possible to believe this serene loveliness Phœbe's. What had the little lively girl in common with this grand, silent woman? Death, the great leveller, had bestowed on his bride the species of beauty supposed to be the prerogative of patrician birth; he had given to her features a statuesque

refinement, and made her hands those of a marble nymph. He had sublimated prettiness into beauty.

The jurymen gazed on her in profoundest pity, tinged with awe. Tears came to the eyes of some: perhaps they had daughters at home. In a very few moments the doctor, with tender hands, covered her again, as if he feared they might disturb her sleep, and then they went silently back to the other room.

Stephen had not moved; he could not look on his sister's face in the company of others. His eyes were hollow, his face ghastly as that of the dead girl, and when he spoke his voice sounded harsh and unnatural. The coroner, fearing the unhappy man might break down under the restraint he was putting upon himself, ordered a chair to be given him; and directly the evidence of the men, who, dredging for sand at Aire-cliff, had in the early morning of the day before found the body of deceased—directly



this had been heard, he called on Stephen to speak.

He stated that his sister was nearly seventeen years old; that her health had always been good, until the beginning of the past summer, when, as she appeared a little delicate, he had sent her to her aunt, Mrs. Dare, at Froxford, for change of air; at the same time arranging with Mrs. Dare that she should, later on, take her to the sea-side. He had seen her twice during her visit to Froxford; once he had gone there, and once she had come home for a few hours. He had thought her looking quite herself again, and she was in good spirits; the last time he saw her was three weeks ago. A fortnight ago he had received a letter from her. Here he produced the letter, and gave it to the coroner. That gentleman, touching the witness's hand in taking the letter, felt it to be like ice.

The letter was a simple effusion, written in a pointed, schoolgirlish hand. Its subject

was the sea-side visit, with the prospect of which the writer seemed well pleased. The coroner read it aloud, and returned it without comment to witness, who proceeded:—He had not been surprised at not hearing again from his sister, supposing her to be busy with preparations for the sea-side visit, or perhaps already departed. The night before yesterday, he had been at Mr. Billington's harvest home, and had returned at about eleven o'clock, in company with Mr. Garland. It was a beautiful night, almost as light as day. They had crossed the weir at Airecliff; they had met no creature, heard no sound; the river was still and calm, though no doubt then deceased lay beneath its waters. Here for the first time the speaker's voice trembled. Not a trace of feeling had before escaped him, and this he instantly suppressed.

Questioned as to deceased's state of mind, he declared it to have been as clear as his own; and further asked if any writing left by her threw light on the present event, he

replied that he had searched her room, and found nothing. When his examination was over, he listened to the next evidence as stoically as he had given his own.

Mrs. Dare, of Froxford, followed, a mild, pale-faced woman, with a thin, plaintive voice, which appeared to have become attenuated by excessive use. This person testified to the coming of deceased to Froxford in the summer, to the apparently frail state of her health, and its subsequent improvement. She stated that up to about a fortnight ago her niece had seemed eager for the sea-side visit, which, witness pathetically informed the jury, had been delayed by Mr. Dare's having an attack of gout. She also explained how Mr. Dare, being the steward at Froxford Park, was vastly respected and considered by the squire's family. At this point the coroner politely led her back to her subject. She then said that just twelve days ago her niece had expressed a great wish to go over to Hillford,

and her uncle sent her in the gig, with instructions to the man to drive her to the foot of the hill. She walked back to Froxford the same evening, very tired and out of spirits, causing her uncle to remark on the strangeness of Stephen's conduct, in not having kept her until the morning. "I know now that she never went home, and the dear lad never saw her; and where she did go nobody can find out," cried Mrs. Dare, woefully.

The coroner asked if it were after this visit that deceased left caring for the projected trip to the sea; to which witness replied that it was. The visit had altogether a bad effect on her; for after it she grew very changeable in her spirits, sometimes laughing, sometimes crying, without any cause. She would also wander about out of doors, though exertion seemed to tire her. When asked why she did not stay quietly in-doors, she said she felt stifled. Once Mrs. Dare had asked her if she had

anything to trouble her; but she laughed and said, "How could I have?" and indeed who would dream of such a child having anything on her mind? For the last few days she had seemed better, much more calm and quiet, and the long-delayed visit to the sea had been fixed for this very day. Here Mrs. Dare wept bitterly a while. Presently she proceeded to relate more plaintively than ever, how on the day before yesterday deceased had said she must go over to Hillford and see Stephen before she went away; how her uncle had replied it was impossible he should send her that day, but on the morrow he would manage it; how she had asked if no neighbour were going, and when they could hear of none, had appeared to acquiesce in her uncle's proposal; how in the afternoon they had missed her, but supposed she would return to tea; and how, when evening fell, they had grown alarmed, and, making inquiries about her, heard that she had been seen on the

Hillford road. Naturally secure of her having gone to her brother, they had slept in peace; and early in the morning Mrs. Dare had driven over to Hillford to fetch her niece—when she heard the awful news.

When asked about deceased having been out of spirits, Mrs. Dare replied that though she was certainly depressed at times, at others she was her usual gay self. She had never seen anything to make her doubt the perfect sanity of deceased.

A rough, brutish-looking man, Varley by name, was the next witness. He described himself as a woodman, and stated how on the evening of Wednesday he was returning from Hillford to his home near Airecliff, when he saw beside the river a man and girl standing together. The girl, he could swear, was Mr. Carr's sister, because her face was towards him; he could not swear to the man, for he did not see his face, but he felt certain he was Mr. Oswald Thane. Here the lawyer

employed by Oswald interfered, asking how far witness was from the couple. Varley allowed he might have been twenty or thirty yards away.

“Can you tell us exactly the hour when you saw them?” asked the lawyer.

“’Twas nigh about half-past eight,” replied the man, surlily.

“Had the moon risen?”

“No, I dunno as her had.”

“Then how can you be certain of the identity of a man whose face you did not see, from whom you confess you were thirty yards distant? Pray, had you been paying a visit to the public-house?”

“Wäll, I had took a drap o’ beer at the Lamb, but that didn’t hinder my seein’,” said the man, doggedly.

“We all know that a drop of beer does occasionally affect a man’s eyesight; especially at half-past eight on a September evening, before the moon has risen,” observed the lawyer, in a lofty tone.

Varley shifted himself from one leg to the other, and rubbed the back of his head.

“Why did you suppose the man in company with deceased to be Mr. Oswald Thane?” asked the coroner.

“Because I ha’ seen ’un wi’ her up in Hillford Wood in the broad daylight many a time,” blurted out Varley.

At the words Stephen started as if suddenly wounded, and with burning eyes stared at the witness.

“When did you see deceased with Mr. Thane?” asked the coroner.

“Oh, in the spring, when I was at work in the wood; they used to come and gather flowers—leastways, she did; an’ one day I seed her put a posy in his button-hole. Please, Mr. Carr, doänt look at me like that; I can’t spake if you do.” The witness addressed these last words to Stephen in an entreating voice, and the latter immediately looked away.

“Did it appear to you that Mr. Thane was



in any way making love to deceased?" asked the coroner.

"I object to that question ; the witness's conclusions can have no bearing on the case," said the lawyer.

"I will put the question in another way," replied the coroner, coldly. "Will you tell us what you saw pass between Mr. Thane and deceased?"

"I never saw nothin' but him laughin' at her chatter, and watchin' her gather the flowers. I s'posed he had come jest to amuse hisself, an' if he'd come for anything else 'twarn't no business o' mine."

Questioned further about seeing the couple by the river, Varley said they appeared to be talking earnestly together, and took no notice of his passing them. He saw nothing more of either after he had passed. He felt sure the man was Mr. Oswald Thane, because of his height and the breadth of his shoulders.

His evidence being finished, the coroner spoke in a low voice to Sergeant Perks.

Immediately that officer left the room, and in a few moments Oswald Thane, accompanied by his father, brother, and Vincent Selous, entered it.

Oswald's face had grown pale, but his step was haughty as ever; and there was still a lingering defiance in his eyes, until they met those of Stephen Carr, literally on fire with revenge. Before that glance Oswald's own eyes fell, and a shudder he could not repress thrilled him for a moment. Hastily he passed on to the end of the room, and took up his position where he could not see Stephen's face.

There had been some doubt in the minds of the less-informed jurymen as to his appearing as a witness; they were therefore relieved when he quietly took the oath, and began in the most candid way to answer the coroner's questions. As he took the Testament in his hand, Mr. Billington, who had been watching Stephen from the other side of the table, crossed the room and seated

himself between the excited man and the witness. The silence in the room was intense, the listeners seemed hardly to breathe in their anxiety to hear every word that might be spoken.

“Did you know the deceased?” asked the coroner.

“Yes, I knew her; she was the sister of my father’s manager, and I remember her quite as a little child.” Oswald spoke in a low voice, yet there was a certain haughtiness in it too.

“Were you in the habit of speaking when you met her?”

“Naturally I was.”

“Did you see and speak with her on Wednesday evening last?”

“Yes.” Most of those present expected a negative answer, and were amazed at the man’s frankness. “I was on my way from Hillford to Ashfield, at about half-past eight. I had chosen to go by the river, as it was a beautiful night. About half way between

Hillford and the weir, I overtook a girl walking slowly along the meadow path. I saw that it was—deceased.” He hesitated ere saying the word, but recovered himself instantly and proceeded:—“I spoke to her, asking if she were well, and if she had been to Mr. Billington’s harvest home. She answered something rather indefinite about being too tired, but gave no reply as to her health. I asked her where she had been staying; she replied at Froxford. I do not remember that I said anything more. I was hurrying to reach Ashfield; I had promised to be there by nine o’clock, and I knew it must be nearly that time. I said good night, and went on. The church clock struck nine a few minutes after I left her. I went on to Ashfield, where I arrived at twenty minutes past nine, as Mr. Selous will testify.”

“Did no other conversation than that you have related pass between you?” asked the coroner.

“None that I can recollect,” responded the witness.

“How long a time would an ordinary walker require to go from the spot where you overtook deceased to Ashfield?”

“About five and twenty minutes. I walked fast.”

“Did you leave the house after entering it?”

“I did not. Mr. Selous had some bachelor friends. We partook of supper, and sat up until a late, or rather an early hour.”

“I am compelled to ask you another question. Have you been accustomed to meet the deceased in Hillford Wood?”

The hot blood flashed into Oswald's face, and involuntarily he bit his lower lip. He was too unprepared for the question to hide the emotion it caused him. His father looked at him in extreme distress, and Geoffrey turned away his face.

“I have met the deceased in Hillford Wood when I have been going to the keeper's.

She went there, I believe, to gather flowers." He made the admission in a tone almost of scorn, as if it were a fact with which he had no concern; and his listeners might easily have imagined his sudden confusion to be the result of annoyance at the drift of the coroner's question.

But one listener that scornful tone infuriated. He rose to his feet and opened his lips. The watchful farmer seized him before he could speak, and pulled him down to his chair again.

"Be quiet, my lad. Let the coroner tackle 'un; you can't do any good;" urged he.

"You wish the jury to understand that your meetings with deceased were not by appointment, but by chance. Is it so?" asked the coroner.

"They were chance meetings. I never made an appointment with deceased," replied Oswald, firmly and distinctly. Alas! he had never had any need to make appointments;

the foolish child had been content to await the chance of his coming.

A slip of paper was handed to the coroner by one of the jurors. "I am informed," said the coroner, "that Hillford Wood is Mr. Thane's private property, and is not used as a promenade by the inhabitants of the town; it therefore seems odd that the deceased should have constantly walked there. May I ask Mr. Thane the elder if he were aware of the fact?"

"The wood is certainly not used by the townspeople generally," said Mr. Thane, rising to answer the coroner's question. "We preserve game there; consequently it has to be kept quiet. But the upper part has lately had the underwood cut, and no one gathering flowers there would be interfered with. Besides, the deceased, being the sister of my manager, would naturally be welcome to walk on any part of my property."

"I have only one more question to ask witness," said the coroner, again turning to

Oswald. "Did you observe anything odd in deceased's manner on the Wednesday evening?"

"No. She only walked and spoke as if she were tired." Oswald moved away and stood beside his father's chair. There was a decidedly relieved expression on his face, which could surprise nobody.

He was followed by his friend, Vincent Selous, a slight, fair man, of rather foreign aspect, who appeared to regard the whole affair as a very unnecessary fuss over a very small matter.

He testified to the arrival of Mr. Oswald Thane at Ashfield exactly at twenty minutes past nine; to his being present at the party the whole of the evening; to the late hour at which his friends separated; and to the sleeping of Mr Oswald Thane at Ashfield.

The evidence of Mr. Selous was corroborated in every particular by his man-servant, who followed him.

There was a pause of a few minutes.



Sergeant Perks went out and returned, making way through the crowded room for Miss Garland, her two brothers, and the vicar. Nervously and with drooping eyes Daphne glided to the other end of the room, and sat down in the chair offered her; but when the coroner began to question her she looked him straight in the face, and replied in an audible, though low voice.

The jurymen leaned over the table, listening with extreme interest to her account of seeing, first Oswald Thane, and then Phoebe Carr, on the fatal Wednesday night. When she reached the part of her story where she begged the unhappy girl to return with her, quite a sensation went through the room: the jurymen looked struck with deeper pity for the lost one, to whom thus, at the last moment, a woman's hand was extended. Mr. Thane turned on the witness a glance of admiring tenderness. In spite of the strong command he was exercising over himself, Oswald's lips trembled, while Vincent

Selous stared at Miss Garland, as if he had never before heard of young ladies caring for their inferiors. But of all the feelings around, whose could compare to Stephen's? He could have knelt at Daphne's feet and blessed her. His rigid face relaxed, his fiery eyes softened, he drew a quick breath.

"Hush, my lad! hush!" whispered the farmer, again fearing he would speak. "Hush! this is good to hear."

In the whole room there was only one man who felt differently; that man was Geoffrey Thane. Set round with a tall palisade of the proprieties and conventionalities, it was impossible for Geoffrey to come out in the open plain and see how things looked in the broad daylight of our common humanity. Therefore, when all her other hearers were touched by Daphne's narrative, so simple and so sad, he was only annoyed that she was compelled to be present at such a scene.

"Did you observe anything strange in the manner of deceased?" asked the coroner,

when Daphne had told of the vain attempt she made to bring Phœbe back.

“I thought she spoke wildly when she said she must go on, and she looked so ill that I felt very sorry I had let her go away; but the children were tired, and the grass was wet, so I did not run after her. I wish, oh! I wish I had!” The girl clasped her hands in agonized regret, and into her sorrowful, dark eyes came the long-repressed tears.

“Then you did think her manner strange?” said the coroner, in a husky voice.

“She did not seem to wish me to notice her, and was very anxious to get away. And I thought her eyes looked wild and her face ghastly; but that might have been the moonlight.”

“Thank you, Miss Garland, your evidence is most valuable,” said the coroner. “It throws a glimmering of light on this most obscure event. Thank you, I have no more questions to ask you.”

In leaving the room Daphne passed close

to Stephen. He put out his hand and touched her dress, as sinners touched the garments of the saints of old.

Hector was the next witness. His usually merry face was a sight to behold, so grave and wondering had it become. His evidence, given frankly and boyishly, was but a repetition of Daphne's.

Poor old Dame Queckett was so affected by the terrible fate of her young mistress, as to be unable to appear. Her deposition was read. It only bore out Stephen's evidence, except that at the end it stated how Mr. Oswald Thane had occasionally come to the cottage when the master was away; but the dame thought he came with messages from the master, and did not trouble herself about him.

Dr. Drew was the last witness. He said that on the morning before, he was fetched by Varley to a cottage beside the river, where he found deceased. She was quite dead. She must have been in the water some hours.

Her face was calm, as calm as now. There was no mark of a struggle, nor any blow on the body. He had known deceased well. She was a bright, gay little thing, the last person in the world likely to commit suicide. He had not seen deceased during the past three months.

There was a pause after the doctor had got so far, and then the coroner, lowering his voice, put a question in four words.

The doctor was silent a moment. It seemed as though he would fain have left the answer to that question in merciful oblivion. But he had no choice. He bowed his head, and in a tone of deep distress he replied, "Yes."

At the word, Oswald Thane gave a great start of horror and amazement, while the thunderstruck Stephen fell back in his chair, as if mortally wounded. Thus for a few moments he stayed, deathly still; then, rising to his feet, he struck out his hand towards the doctor.

"It is a lie! It is a lie!" he cried,

passionately, and so stood, all eyes, but those of Oswald and the unwilling witness, turned on him. Glaring at the latter, as if he would compel him to retract his word, by the very force of his gaze he made the doctor look at him. Alas! in those compassionate eyes, that grieved face, was but a repetition of the cruel word. He dropped his hand. A flush of shame, burning as if set on fire of hell, rose to his brow; it died away, leaving him pale and cold as death. He clenched his fist. "If it is true, that blackguard shall answer for it!" he muttered, hoarsely; and therewith he made a movement towards Oswald. But both the farmer and Sergeant Perks had laid their hands on him, fearing this outburst.

"For God's sake, lad, be quiet! They'll put you in charge, and then you'll not be able to do nothin'," urged the farmer, hardly knowing what he said. Then, seeing Stephen listen to him, he continued, "If you were locked up, who 'ud there be to see justice

done? Here, lad, come with me." So saying, he attempted to lead him out into the passage, but that was so blocked up with anxious waiters, he was obliged to take him into the inner chamber, where she lay; but even this he felt to be better than leaving him in the same room with Oswald Thane.

The young man entered quietly, and gazed at the sheeted form. "Go," he said, turning to his conductor. "I will wait for the verdict here."

Slowly the farmer went, and closing the door between the rooms, stood outside, ready to interpose should Stephen try to come out. But Stephen had no intention of so doing. Directly the farmer left the room, he quietly locked the door, and, after a moment's hesitation, crossed the room and stood close beside the dead. Should he look on the face of the child? How could he? It had been impossible to him an hour ago, when he had believed her only the victim of false hopes. How could he, when he knew her not only

dead, but dishonoured? Perhaps, had it been simply her own whiteness she had soiled, he might have forgiven her; but he felt as if he could curse the child who had blemished her mother's name.

Stephen was in the highly excited state when the mind hardly discriminates between the real and the unreal. Staring fixedly at the shrouded figure, he suddenly thought he saw the covering of the face move. Forgetting all his wrath, he hastily lifted the sheet, and, putting his face close to hers, listened intently. But all was still. She lay there at peace; not heeding the tumult of passion near her; not seeing the pitiful looks of those who grieved for her; not hearing the bandying of her name on men's lips; past all blame, as past all suffering. A great wave of tenderness broke over Stephen's soul. This was the child his mother had confided to his care—the child he had promised to guard and keep. “Phœbe, Phœbe!” he groaned. “Why didn't you tell me? I wouldn't have been hard



upon you, child ! ” And so saying, he smoothed her long hair.

But as he touched it, he felt how damp and clammy it yet was. A change passed over his face. Again it grew rigid. He put his hand in his pocket, drew out his knife and with it cut a long lock of the darkened hair. Bending down he kissed her marble brow, muttering, “ I swear ! ” Then he covered her face, went to the door, opened it, and in all outward seeming calm, he re-entered the room just as the jury were retiring.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE VERDICT.

“Justice is like the kingdom of God—it is not without us as a fact, it is within us as a great yearning.”—*Romola*, Chap. lxvii.

DURING Stephen's absence from the room, Oswald's lawyer had addressed the jury on the possibility of the deceased having met her death by accident. It was an improbable theory, the left bank of the river being so closely set with willow and alder trees, except just opposite the Boatman's Rest, that there seemed hardly a spot where one could fall in and find no branches to cling to. Besides this, the evening had been a light one, and deceased knew the path well. Still, some people seized on the idea, as being the least painful one they could find.

When the lawyer had finished, the coroner proceeded to sum up the evidence and charge the jury.

“Gentlemen,” said he, “you are called here to decide on a sad and mysterious event. A young girl, not yet seventeen, cheerful, healthy, and beloved, standing on the threshold of life, with every apparent prospect of a happy future, is found drowned. We have no witness to the catastrophe, neither can any one recall a word spoken by deceased, neither has she left a line of writing that throws any light on the case. Her brother has told you how of late she seemed out of health, and how on that account he sent her away for change of air. Her aunt confirms this evidence, adding that up to a fortnight since both her health and spirits improved; the cause of both again declining she attributes to a visit deceased paid to Hillford. Concerning the motives and result of this visit, we are entirely ignorant. She certainly did not go to her own home, nor can we hear of

any creature who saw her. After this she grew restless and variable, causing her aunt to ask if she had anything on her mind, to which inquiry she gave an evasive answer. Mrs. Dare's conclusion that so young a girl could not have much to trouble her, was natural enough. We now come to the fatal journey of deceased to Hillford. You have heard Mrs. Dare's account of her departure. We have no further knowledge of her until, according to Varley's evidence, she stood beside the river, talking to a man. This man Mr. Oswald Thane says was himself. He tells us he asked her a few unimportant questions, remarked on her weary manner, and passed quickly on to Ashfield, where, Mr. Selous witnesses, he stayed until half-past ten o'clock the next morning. Immediately on Mr. Thane's departure, deceased was seen by Miss Garland, attempting to hide as she passed. Miss Garland has given an exceedingly clear account of the conversation between deceased and herself. She tells us

she thought deceased looking very thin and pale, and is the only witness who noticed any wildness in her manner. That she felt some uneasiness on deceased's account is shown by the remark her brother tells us that she made when deceased had gone, 'I wish I had made her come; she looks so ill.'

"Both the brother and aunt of deceased speak positively as to her perfect sanity; but, gentlemen, in the office I hold, I am not without experience of the sanest minds being temporarily upset by cruel circumstances. The unhappy condition of deceased may have furnished a motive for self-destruction. It is quite conceivable that a modest girl, respectably born and connected, having been deluded to her ruin, would feel the future too terrible to be borne, and would rather 'trust her soul with God,' than her fate with the world. The evidence, so far as it has gone, points to this conclusion; but it certainly does not prove it.

"Gentlemen, we have just listened to an

argument on the possibility of the deceased having met her death by accident. In these mysterious cases the possibility of accident must always be admitted, and though here it seems unlikely, both because of the safety of the river path, and the deceased's intimate acquaintance with it, yet you will remember how, in her excited state, it needed but a stumble over the root of a tree to precipitate her into the deep and fast-flowing stream. You will therefore take this second possibility into consideration.

“Gentlemen, the last point before us is the possibility of the deceased having come to her death by violence. The only person suspected, even in the most remote degree, as likely to desire her death, has proved satisfactorily and conclusively that he parted from deceased before nine o'clock, when Miss Garland met her; that he proceeded to his friend's house, and could not have seen her again. With this gentleman's former notice of deceased, his own evidence and that of

Mr. Selous prove, you have nothing to do. You are called upon to pronounce on the manner of her death, not on the circumstances which impelled her to it. Gentlemen, you will consider your verdict."

The jury left the room. Stephen sat down on a seat near the door; but Oswald remained standing; his manner had grown even more defiant, and that because he was stung by the coroner's words, as that gentleman intended he should be. Mr. Thane's face was grave and sad, and he listened dejectedly to the lawyer, who seemed very eager about something. Lux Garland stood in absolute silence beside the vicar, who in a faltering voice, murmured a few words to Dr. Drew.

In less than a quarter of an hour the jurymen returned to the room, and pronounced the verdict, "Found Drowned." There was a dead silence in the room; it was broken by the lawyer.

"Gentlemen, may I ask if you will state publicly that no suspicion of being concerned

in the death of deceased rests upon my client, Mr. Oswald Thane ? ”

At the words Stephen rose and looked fixedly at the jurymen. None of them heeded him ; they were talking in low tones among themselves and to the coroner. Presently the foreman stood up.

“ We are of opinion that the evidence entirely clears Mr. Oswald Thane from any suspicion of having been concerned in the death of deceased.” He spoke as if compelled to utter distasteful words.

“ What ! ” exclaimed a fierce voice, and with one stride Stephen was in the centre of the room. “ What ! you say this man had no concern in the death of my sister ? He goes out of the room with no suspicion on him, no shade on his character, when he as surely murdered that innocent child as if he threw her into the river with his own hands ! You call this justice ? You call this law ? I swear ”—he lifted his hand with a wild gesture—“ I would swear by God, if I believed



in Him. But there is no God, or such things as this could not be. I swear, then, by my dead sister, who lies there," pointing to the inner room, "and by this lock of hair," taking the long tress of fair hair from his bosom and kissing it; "I swear I will be revenged on Oswald Thane for my sister's death."

A great shudder went through the room; even Oswald winced, though, perhaps, not so much at the fierce threat as at the sight of the hair he had once played with and caressed.

"Stephen Carr," said the coroner, sternly, "if I did not pity you from my heart, and believe your great trouble had unsettled your mind, I should be compelled to give you in charge."

Stephen did not seem to hear, he stood gazing defiantly at Oswald.

"Stephen, Stephen," quavered the vicar, "you are wrong to defy the law; you are wicked to defy God."

"Hush, parson! hush, sir! this isn't the time for that; you jest leave 'un to me;" said the farmer, coming quickly across the room.

"Steäve," he said, taking both the young man's hands in his, the tears quite streaming down his rosy cheeks; "Steäve, my lad, we are all as sorry for you, and for her, the poor little gal, as if you was our own flesh and blood. There isn't a man of us but would ha' saved her if he could. I've never been so sorry for nothin' since my Jenny died, an' if 'twould do you or her any good, I'd speak as strong as you. But it won't. And look here, my lad, you're not alone; you've got me; an' you shall come an' be my son."

The touch, the words, the tears, all so tender, went to the unhappy man's heart; he slipped on a chair, and, drooping his head, he laid it on the farmer's arm. With his free hand, Mr. Billington waved the on-lookers to depart, and, reverencing the strong man's agony, they all silently quitted the room.

Mr. Thane lingered behind the rest, and tried to speak; but then, perchance deeming words from himself were almost insulting at such an instant, he too walked slowly out.

For a while there was no sound in the room but Stephen's deep sobs. These were the first tears he had shed for his sister, and they seemed to relieve the terrible pressure on his brain. "You are the only friend I have in the world," he murmured, presently; "the only soul that cares for my misery. Oh! Mr. Billington, the world is as black as hell to me."

"I know 'tis, my lad; I know 'tis. But you shall come out o' this smokified, oilified town, and live up on the hill with the sheep an' the birds; an' time 'll do summut for you. Ah! time's about the best doctor."

"Time!" ejaculated Stephen, lifting his head from the farmer's arm—"time will never heal the wound I've got here; there's only one thing that can do that. And tell me," he continued, his eyes again flashing,

his voice again hard, "how could you, an honest, fearless man like you, agree with those servile slaves, to clear the villain's name?"

"There was no help for it, Steäve! there was no help for it!" replied the farmer, shaking his head. "'Twas as plain as a pike-staff as he didn't put the poor little gal in the water; an' a man may be morally guilty over an' over agen, an' the law can't touch him."

"What do I care for the law?" cried Stephen, fiercely. "I want justice."

"They be very different things, Steäve, my lad—two very different things. Not much 'kin to one another, as fur as ever I've found out. One's easy enough to come at if you've got a good long purse; but, däne it, you may whistle for t'other."

"I have sworn to have justice, and justice I will have!" said the young man, in tones of deep solemnity.

"There, lad; let's get away from this place.

We can talk freer on Oakwood Hill," said the farmer, fearing a return of Stephen's frantic mood.

"I can't come till after the funeral," replied the young man, in a low voice. "And if you will be so kind as to see Mr. Evelyn for me, and arrange the day and hour, I shall take it as the friendliest act you have ever done me."

The farmer readily accepted the task, and forthwith departed in search of the vicar.

The crowd outside the inn had awaited in dogged patience the result of the inquest, and when it was known that the jury had retired, a few men who stood near the door contrived to edge themselves into the passage, and so obtained speedy enlightenment as to the verdict. They, of course, lost no time in publishing it to their less fortunate comrades, and in a few minutes it was blazoned abroad. Great was the discontent it evoked ; discontent, caused, not by pity for the dead girl, nor by sympathy with her brother, nor even by dis-

satisfaction at a "swell" having got off scot-free; but rather by that morbid love of sensation which dwells very near the hearts of the uncultivated. No excitement now remained for them except that of watching the jurymen and witnesses come out.

They looked on at the departures in silence, until Oswald Thane's tall form appeared in the doorway. Then arose a second storm of groans and yells; but louder and deeper than the first.

"Shame!" growled a stalwart man close to the carriage. "Shame to deceive the poor gal, and then to drown her!"

Oswald turned rapidly to the speaker, his fist clenched, a sparkle in his eye, as if he would fain have fought every man there. He had shrunk from Stephen, but he could face these.

Sergeant Perks interposed, and Geoffrey laid hold of his brother's arm. Together they forced him into the carriage, which drove away midst loud shouts and hisses.

Oswald sat erect, prouder, more defiant than ever. Geoffrey's swarthy face was flushed with shame and annoyance, while their father, grieved and pale, leaned back in the carriage, saying no word.

"Father," ventured Oswald, gently, when they had left the crowd far behind, and were slowly ascending the hill—"Father, don't blame me more than you can help."

Mr. Thane looked him sorrowfully in the face. "Not blame you, when it is plain even to me that you have in very deed caused the death of this child!—even to me, who would rather have died than be compelled to believe it!"

"I swear to you, father, that I had no idea——" cried Oswald, flushing. "I am not quite such a brute as you think me."

"I thankfully believe you did not forsake her, knowing the extent of your responsibility and her despair; you were brute enough, without that, Oswald."

"You are very hard upon me, father.

Yet, after all, I am only like other men, and I did not make myself."

"To a certain degree all men make themselves," replied Mr. Thane. "They make their own habits, and their habits are parts of themselves. Geoffrey quoted the other day this sentence from some Greek philosopher, about whom no doubt you both know a great deal more than I, 'Our habits are in our own power; our actions not always.' They are words every man should write on his soul. Now, my boy, have you ever in your life denied yourself one single thing which you desired? You know you never have. I blame myself. I did not teach you self-restraint, as it was my solemn duty to have done. Perhaps I idly thought no son of mine could need it." He spoke with painful emphasis. Oswald did not answer him; and by-and-by he resumed—"What a miserable, accursed state of society this is, which leaves the lowly at the mercy of their superiors! or rather I



should say, the poor at the mercy of the rich ! Had it not been my father's fortune to scrape together a heap of gold, I might ere this have seen my brother's child, your wife, Oswald, come to a like end."

"Good God ! What do you mean ?" ejaculated his son.

"I mean that the daughters of the rich are guarded and kept with unceasing care. They are like the exotics in a hot-house, which, when plucked, are plucked to be honoured and admired ; while the daughters of the poor, like wild flowers, are at the mercy of any passer-by. Too often these pluck them in mere wantonness, retain them but a moment, and then throw them away, to be trodden under foot. Poor little thing ! If I had only known !" His voice grew pathetic, and then sank into silence.

At that moment Oswald would have given much could the thing done have been undone. For the first time in his life, a pleasant folly

had suddenly become a bitter pain. He was paying a great price for a very small amusement; and in his heart he could but say, "O fool! fool!"

When a man is thus forced to estimate the past in the light of the present, by the added light of weeks, months, or years, he has a God-given moment—a rare occasion—one of those occasions which become rarer if disregarded, until they cease altogether, leaving the man to hug his follies, incapable of foreseeing how hideous those follies will appear when the great light of eternity shines on them.

No further word was spoken by either of the three occupants of the carriage. Geoffrey, indeed, had not spoken at all on the homeward way, but preserved a frigid silence, expressive of disgust and annoyance. Oswald was accustomed to pass over Geoffrey's opinions and prejudices in a somewhat cool manner, pronouncing him the prince of prigs. To-day, however, he would have

welcomed a word of regret or sympathy, for, notwithstanding his defiant haughtiness, he felt so morally ragged and out-at-elbows, that a kind expression, even from Geoffrey, would not have been valueless. Geoffrey, whether in ignorance or disregard of his brother's feelings, spoke no word, good or bad, and when the carriage reached Thaneleigh, dismounted and retired at once to his own room. Oswald stayed at Thaneleigh only half an hour, and then set off for London, to rejoin his deserted wife.

Henrietta was entirely free from suspicion of her husband having gone home on any account but business; and, though she was astonished at such a claim interfering with hers, she took it very amiably, making use of his absence to rest and sleep during the greater part of the day. Henrietta knew well the secret for preserving youth and good looks. When Oswald, tired and depressed with the excitement of the day, returned to her, she welcomed him with

an affectionate gaiety that was balm to his soul.

There was not much time for conversation, and Henrietta only asked if the business which had called him away was satisfactorily settled, and if they could now safely go on to Dover, before they were summoned to dinner, and immediately afterwards, they set out on their night journey. With a feeling of intense relief, Oswald followed his wife into the train; with yet greater satisfaction he went on board the Calais boat, feeling that the horrible nightmare which had oppressed him was left on the Dover pier. He was bound for the sunny South, in company with the woman he loved. He had once thought that, encircled by those exquisite arms, gazed at by those melting eyes, kissed by those perfect lips, a man might well believe hell itself to be heaven. And now these were to be his, in the fairest land under the broad sky. What room had he in his heart for care? What room for regret?

What room even for remembrance of that unwelcome encounter by the river, which the coming of the Croft children had shortened, to the man's relief and the girl's despair?

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE END OF THE DAY.

“My heart was sad in me,  
Seeing the ineffable miseries of life.”

*The Epic of Hades.*

WHEN the fly containing the vicar and the three Garlands stopped at the door of the Croft, Daphne hastily dismounted, and, avoiding all eyes, went upstairs to her own little room. Here, crouched upon the floor, she sat through the long afternoon hours, overwhelmed with shame and grief. The fate of the girl she had known and cared for, touched her to the heart. She felt in every nerve Phœbe's anguish, horror, and despair. For a while, incapable of thought, her whole being did but pulsate great throbs of pain ;

and when after a time thought became possible, it only rendered the pain more acute. Over and over again she recalled Phœbe, in her prettiness, her childishness, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed, golden-haired. What had such a creature in common with the shrouded form at the inn? With bitter, self-accusing regret, she recalled the later Phœbe, the ghostly face she had seen in the Aire meadows—the Phœbe who had, indeed, foreshadowed the present one. Ah! could she but have known, she would have insisted on her return from the river-side. Could she but have known!

“Had I but known!” Saddest of all pitiful, loving human utterances, because too late.

Daphne’s own trouble was forgotten in the suffering of another; and with reason; for what was her fate compared to this? Her young soul had sometimes almost deemed it sweet to have so fair a cause for melancholy; and when the small cares and hardnesses of

life did not allow her to feel so romantically, she, at any rate, tried to accept her lot bravely, and in some sort triumphed. That sorrow did not come up out of the dust, but was sent by One who knew its refining power, and could see the end from the beginning, she had always religiously believed. Anything to make her doubt the goodness of God, to confuse her belief in the divine government of the world, she had never experienced. She had read of shameful deeds gloried in, and unpunished to the end; of cruel events crushing the innocent, and setting the guilty up on high; but these things were too far off to be real to her mind. And, lo! the awful fact of wrong close at hand; wrong never to be righted; wrong, the revelation of which is, to the young, pure soul, the revelation of hell, causing it to shrink in dumb despair, or cry out in passionate pain, "God, if this be the life Thou hast made, let me not have the shame of living!"—this awful fact was before her now.



As she thought of the victim, she could but remember also the worker of the wrong. At first she thought of him with horror and loathing; but, after a while, with a pity almost as great as that she felt for Phoebe. Was he not to be pitied? Must not his life be for ever darkened by the shadow of the drowned girl? Could people help doing wrong? Was everything blind chance? Were we all adrift on a havenless sea? In the sudden overturn of her faith in the goodness and justice of the Divine Ruler, the devout child was almost ready to exclaim with the exasperated Stephen, "There is no God!" Alas! it is not the fool alone who has thus spoken; the wise man, maddened by wrong, has cried it too. But the one has said it in flippant indifference, or scientific conceit; the other in agonized despair.

How long Daphne remained the prey of emotions so exhausting, she did not know. When she raised her head, and, with limbs

cramped and aching, slowly dragged herself from the floor, the day was fast dying. The sun had gone; twilight, tender and pitiful, brooded over the land. She went to the window. Out of the soft, green, western sky, Venus, large and radiant, looked straight into her room. She shuddered, and turned away; the beauty mocked her. All this loveliness was but a veil, hiding horror, shame, and death.

While Daphne was partly struggling against, partly conquered by, doubts which do not often beset the heaven of a young girl's belief, the vicar, in the solitude of his study, meditated, profoundly sad. Richard Evelyn had been content with life, happy in his relations with others, at peace with his parish. He had above all been quite sure of the divine order of all things, both natural and social; and though, as [parson of the parish, he could not be ignorant of much evil therein, yet he had a sweet belief in the preponderance of good over evil, and

a firm confidence in the eventual righting of all wrongs.

It seemed to him now as if his content, his peace, had suffered hopeless shipwreck. Could he ever again go among his people with smiles and cheerful talk?—he, who had lost one of the fairest lambs of his flock? Had he cared so little for his charge, and taught them so badly, that there was implanted no holy lesson in the heart to restrain the wandering feet? With mournful self-reproach he confessed himself to have been a careless shepherd, unworthy of the great trust committed to him. There was a certain satisfaction to the vicar's soul in this self-blame. It saved him from following out questionings, he, at their very first appearance in his consciousness, esteemed to be little less than blasphemous—by making the human factor responsible, not the divine.

He thought of Phoebe, with a sorrowful tenderness, mixed with a shrinking dread; that she had sought her own death there

could be but little doubt, though, happily, the verdict of the jury left it an open question, thus making it possible for the Church to bless her burial. The vicar was thankful for this indefiniteness, but none the less did he weary himself with the thought of the child having entered eternity by means of an unpardonable sin. His only rest was in believing her to have been for the moment actually mad, and thus not answerable for the deed; so believing, he could better bear to ponder on her fate.

Of Oswald he thought bitterly. He had been touched by the young man's humiliation and present unhappy position; but now he had time to reflect, and felt that any degree of pain he might suffer was well merited. That human nature was human and not angelic, he well knew; and he did not, in young men at least, expect to find entire blamelessness; but to his chivalric soul there was something specially base in the deluding and forsaking of an ignorant child. Respect

for the weak, truth towards the trusting, were primal articles of the Evelyn creed; and, judged by these, Oswald's conduct looked black—so black, that the vicar's condemnation of him was sterner than he had ever before pronounced upon an erring man.

From the day of Phoebe's death the people noticed how years seemed added to the vicar's age. He walked falteringly, and with bent head. The sunny smile, if from long habit it generally kept its home, yet often now faded out into sadness; the merry speech was less ready than before, and when it came had somehow a pitiful tone. In truth, the memory of the event remained persistently with him. Had he been able to speak of it to his sister, he would have felt it less; but Mrs. Anson's delicate ears were not to be offended by the mention of unpleasant subjects. Had either Phil or Jack been in England, he would have gone to his nephew, and, in spite of the difference in age, have told him his sorrow.

But both Phil and Jack had gone back to Algeria, Phil having had a return of some alarming symptoms while exploring the Pyrenees. He therefore bore his burden alone, and grew old under it.

## CHAPTER VII.

## DAPHNE'S ERRAND.

“Lo spirito mio ; . . . .

. . . . . da lei mosse

D'antico amor sentì la gran potenza.”

*Divina Commedia, Purg. xxx.*

THREE days after the inquest, as Daphne and Lux were walking along the Tory road, they were met by Farmer Billington, not, as usual, riding his high-stepping mare, but driving his brown cob in a gig.

“I was jest comin’ down to see you, Miss Daphne, and ask if you’d do summut for me,” said he, pulling up his horse, and leaning over the side of the gig. “It’s that lad Stephen. I’ve been tryin’ to get him to come up to the Grange for a few days, an’ I

can't make nothin' on 'un, nothin' at all. He takes no more notice o' my speakin' than a pig do o' Sunday ; he jest sits wi' his head in his hands, lookin' half dead. He'll go mad for certain, if he stops all alone by hisself in that dismal house any longer. Now, he allus thought a deal o' you, Miss Daphne, an' you was the last as spoke to the poor, pretty little gal ; so, thinks I to myself, he'll listen to her more nor anybody else. So off I was drivin' to see if you'd come an' persuade 'un."

"I will come," replied Daphne, at once.

"But is Mrs. Billington willing to receive him ? She used to be afraid of his Radicalism," said Lux.

"That's all over now, bless you," answered the farmer. "'Däne it, Jäne,' I says to her ; 'the fellow's as proud as you, an' that's about as proud as Lucifer, an' he can't bear to see nobody.' 'I can feel for 'un,' says she. 'I used to be agen 'un, because he was for settin' the lower on a level wi' the upper ; but when the upper behaves so to the lower, 'tis time they



was hustled about a bit. He's in trouble; he don't like facing people; so jest you go an' fetch 'un up here.' There, that's what Jäne says. Ah! she's a sound 'un, is Jäne, sound at the core, though she is a little hoity-toity now an' then."

"Well, I hope you will persuade him," said Lux, with a sigh. "I tried to see him yesterday, but Dame Queckett said he saw nobody."

"We shan't ask leave; we shall take it," said the farmer.

Stephen's cottage, with its garden, a little while ago so bright and flourishing, looked utterly deserted. The flowers were past their first bloom, and had an untrimmed appearance. There were weeds in the gravel walk, and a long spray of the climbing rose flung itself quite across the doorway. Daphne tapped softly at the door, and Dame Queckett, shrunken and lachrymose, opened it.

"He won't see anybody," quavered she, divining Daphne's errand. "He just stops in

there," pointing to the sitting-room, "a-walkin' up and down the room every now and agen; and he's never touched a mouthful o' vittels, only drinks water, water, as if he was a-fire. O good Lord! but 'tis a sad sight to see un'!"

"You will let me go in? He will not be angry, I am sure," said Daphne, gently.

"Well, miss, if you likes to take the blame on yerself, you may go in. I'm sure it's mæin good o' you to come and comfort him."

"There is neither help nor comfort." These words, with their plaintive music, from the first duet in *Elijah*, rang in Daphne's ears, as, after waiting in vain an answer to her knock, she opened the sitting-room door and went in.

Beside the table, his head resting on his arm, sat Stephen, in an attitude of profound melancholy. He did not move at her entrance, but remained as if insensible to his surroundings. She hesitated a few moments, then came and stood beside him,

"Stephen," she said, softly. He did not answer, but she saw him start, and a thrill go over his whole frame. She laid her hand upon his arm. "Stephen, I want you to come with me."

Slowly he raised his head and looked at her, with just such eyes as the wanderer on the borders of purgatory lifted to the blessed face of Beatrice—eyes half bewildered, half ashamed.

The girl repressed the word of pity that came to her lips at sight of his haggard face, and only repeated her first speech, "You will come with me?"

He gazed at her for some moments in silence, his eyes growing pathetic. "You are the last creature who spoke to her, except her murderer; you spoke kindly—you, the spotless, to her——" He stood up, he grasped both her hands. "Tell me," he cried, in a voice of intense emotion, "would you have spoken so if you had known?"

"Yes, yes. If I had known, I would have

brought her back ; I would have made her come. Oh, if I had only known ! Oh dear, dear !” She sobbed out the words like a grieved child, and tears dropped on the hands that held hers.

For an instant the young man felt the power of the ancient love strong within him ; he bent down and wildly kissed her hands. “Tears ; your tears ! They should wash away the memory of all wrong,” he cried. Then, suddenly returning to his present self, he murmured hoarsely, “They are only water—water, and this must be washed away in blood !”

Daphne had been alarmed and embarrassed at his kisses, but this change of words and manner banished everything except terror lest he should go actually mad, as the farmer had said. “Pray, pray do not speak so !” entreated she. “If you care for me, as you once said, you will give up all thought of revenge, when I beg you. What good can it do ? It will only add to the wrong. Stephen, promise me you will give it up.”

“Will you give me love in its place?” The question rose in his heart, but his lips did not utter it. If it were possible she could give it, could he take it? Could heaven be conjured out of hell at a word? The power of ancient love was strong; but the new-born desire of revenge was stronger.

The things we have most earnestly longed for come to us only to mock us. Desire seems to have a sort of miraculous power of attaining the things desired; only, when attained, they are worthless; the rosy fruit is tasteless, the sparkling nectar dead.

There had been a time when Stephen had thought that to hold her unresisting hands in his would be something to die for. Now that he actually held them, he felt only how they were drawing him from the purpose of his life. Gently he dropped them, and, folding his arms, stood erect. “Where do you wish to take me, Miss Garland?” he asked.

“Mr. and Mrs. Billington want you to go to the Grange for a little while; and indeed,

Stephen, it is better you should go. To stay here alone must be bad for you," said she, much relieved by the calmness of his manner.

"You mean I shall go mad if I stay here? I have thought of that. I will do as you wish."

"Ah, how glad the dear old farmer will be! He is waiting for you now," said Daphne, quite excitedly.

"Did he come a little while ago and ask me? I have a confused remembrance of something."

"Yes, I think he did."

"Then I suppose when he found he could make nothing of me, he got you to come and persuade me. I understand now, and am very much obliged to you, Miss Garland, for the trouble you have taken about me."

"Shall I tell Mr. Billington you will come?" asked Daphne, looking at Stephen in some surprise at the cold tone of his voice.

"If you please; I will be out with him in a few minutes," replied he, in the same way.

He was in fact hurt that he owed Daphne's visit to the farmer, and not to herself.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand.

He took it and looked into her soft brown eyes. The last touch, the last look. He knew and wished it so. "I can never thank you for your kindness to my sister. The only light in the darkness surrounding her death has been shed by you. I bless you for it, and shall bless you for ever and ever." He spoke and departed.

Daphne left the house, gave Stephen's message to the farmer, and, accompanied by Lux, went sadly down the hill. "He will never get over it," she said, when she had told her brother the facts of the interview, leaving out, of course, the references to Stephen's long-past declaration.

"You are only a baby yet, Daph," he replied, drily; "you will know when you are older that time cures everything but a bad temper and an empty purse."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### STEPHEN'S VISIT.

"I shall be alone until I die."

TENNYSON, *Enone*.

MRS. BILLINGTON'S reception of Stephen was everything the farmer's heart could desire. No "daughter of a hundred earls" could have behaved with finer breeding. Neither by word nor look did she hint in the remotest degree at his trouble, yet her whole manner expressed an understanding of his present mood—an understanding more soothing to him than the warmest sympathy. She had but to look at Stephen's face to know how he had suffered. The eyes were large, the cheeks worn with fasting and emotion; the



whole effect ghastly. She saw, and, better than even a more refined and emasculated soul, she understood.

The farmer was almost radiant at the accomplishment of his undertaking. His eyes regained their half-forgotten twinkle, his lips their comical speeches, and with his usual overflowing hospitality, he began to press his guest to eat ; but his wife, who was setting about the business of the tea-table in her most methodical style, signified to him—in the mysterious sign-language used by wives, and obediently noted by husbands who have any regard for peace—that he should leave Stephen to her care. Mr. Billington, of course, immediately quitted the subject, allowing his wife to supply the fasting man with food ; which duty she performed with such quiet assurance that no remedy remained to the young man but to eat the delicacies set before him. Principally intent upon hiding all emotion under a calm exterior, Stephen ate mechanically,

and found, as he ate, that the hysterical sensation in his throat began to pass away, and his spent force to return.

After the first evening he became in many respects his old self. More silent than before, he yet talked when he saw either his host or hostess desired it; and though seeking solitude as he had before sought companionship, he never appeared to shrink from their society. From all other he did shrink. Lux Garland made several vain attempts to see him, as also did the vicar. He seemed always to have prevision of their coming, and to depart for a long walk, or to some distant farm work. The farm work he attempted in a fitful way, now trying this, now that. Hoeing, hedging, ploughing, shepherding, he tried them all, and did all well, except the ploughing, in which he found that to run a straight furrow was by no means the easy thing it looked.

For a few days the country calm and solitude did him good; but after a very short

time they did but increase the fever of his brain. The long hours of uninterrupted thought, in the midst of Nature's silence, maddened him. Work, like his old work, unceasing, absorbing, requiring the powers both of mind and body; this he must have again, but not in Hillford. He could never enter the Thaneleigh factory, never give orders to its mill-hands any more. He must go away. His resolution was quickly taken, and but for the pain he knew he should give his entertainers, he had not stayed beyond three or four days.

One damp, dull afternoon in the early October, the vicar drove his quaint old carriage up Oakwood Hill to the Grange. The clouds were low and heavy, giving the day an appearance of twilight; and the Grange hall was quite dusky as the vicar crossed it, following the rosy-cheeked housemaid into the parlour. Beside a blazing fire sat the farmer, smoking; his wife opposite him, with her knitting in her hands.

"Why, sir, this is a pleasure. 'Tis the sun shining through a fog," said Mr. Billington, putting his pipe in the fender, and rising to his feet as quickly as his rather stiff legs permitted. "Here was Jäne and me a-sittin' quite dumb, a-wonderin' which was the stupidest. 'Do say summut, Jäne,' says I; 'I hates a woman as can't talk.' 'I don't think o' anything to say,' says she. 'You'd think soon enough if you wasn't wanted to talk. Women for contrariness beats everything but pigs;' and, sir, them two are about equal, for if you wants a pig to go one way, you've only got to take hold of his tail and pull him the other, and then, däne it, if he won't go your way as sweet as a lamb after his mother; and women's just as awkkerd. I've studied 'em, sir, I've studied 'em."

"Women, or pigs?" asked Mr. Evelyn, smiling.

"Both of 'em, both of 'em," chuckled the farmer.

"The master must have his joke," observed Mrs. Billington, serenely.

"And what do you think of the prospect of a general election?" asked the vicar, presently.

"Well, I suppose it'll come," replied the farmer; "but if it do, 'twon't make any difference to us. Our three'll stand, Franky Blount and all."

"I heard a rumour the other day of Mr. St. Maur again contesting," observed the vicar.

"More fool he! But, dāne it, there's no need to say that, for, of course, if he's a Radical he must be a fool!" drawled the farmer, totally forgetting he was only giving a sort of cross-echo to Lawyer Edkins's words after the Liberal meeting.

It is curious how ready we all are to assert the imbecility of both our political and religious opponents; as if it were impossible for any sensible person to hold opinions diverse from our own. The Tory calmly pro-

nounces the Radical "a crack-brained chatterer"; the Radical irascibly dubs the Tory "a wooden-headed dummy."

A popular journal of to-day speaks of "sacerdotal proceedings, which all sensible persons thoroughly condemn"; while the late Pio Nono, when giving audience to heretics, frankly and earnestly prayed that light might illumine their darkened intellects. His amiable Holiness believed that he possessed the clear, white light of truth. What Protestant, cleric or laic, does not deem himself its possessor too? And which of us, Catholic or Protestant, realizes how this clear, white light is apt to get tinted by the colouring of his special notions? Let a man, when standing in the sunlight, interpose a piece of coloured glass between his eyes and the landscape, and all the world will become to him blue, yellow, rose-coloured, according the hue of his particular medium. Our opinions and prejudices are the coloured glass, the me-

dia through which we see and judge the world.

The vicar's reflections did not run in this line; he was occupied with one wish—the wish to see Stephen, and he let the farmer's remarks pass unnoticed.

“How is Stephen? Is he in the house?” he asked, presently.

“He's out wi' the sheep, I believe,” replied the farmer, sighing. “The lad will work; an' p'raps 'tis best for 'un. As to his health, that's better, I'm thinkin'.”

“I have come on a very awkward errand. I am the bearer of a message from Mr. Thane to Stephen,” said the vicar, nervously, drawing his hand over his forehead. “Mr. Thane is very, very much distressed at this sad event; but he feels that Stephen would probably refuse to see and hear him in person. He has therefore asked me to bring him a message to the effect that if he had rather give up his post at the factory, as Mr. Thane fears he will wish to do, Mr. Thane will

furnish him with testimonials of the highest description ; will see any mill-owner Stephen may fancy, and explain to him as much or as little of the circumstances of the case as Stephen likes. Also, if he will only accept the means of living, at least until he is settled, Mr. Thane——”

“That he will never do, I am sure,” interrupted Mrs. Billington, to the vicar’s great amazement. “I don’t believe he will even take the testimonials. But he is in the house ; you shall ask him for yourself.” As she spoke, she rose and left the room, giving the vicar no time to recover from the shock of her sudden speech.

“’Tis wonderful, real wonderful, how Jäne treats the poor lad,” said the farmer thoughtfully, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. “She understands ’un a deal better nor me. Women are the unaccountablest creatures ! jest what you think they’ll like they hates, and jest what you think they’ll hate they likes.”



While Mr. Billington commented on the contrariness of women, his wife went to Stephen's door and gently tapped thereat.

He opened it, looking in the dim light more ghostly than usual.

"Stephen, the vicar is come to see you," she said.

"I can't see him ; it is impossible."

"I wouldn't have troubled you about it, you may be sure ; but he has brought a message from Mr. Thane, which neither me nor the master could very well give you. And Stephen, if you can, you'd better hear it, and send your own answer." There was a subdued defiance in her voice, as if she fain would have the wording of that answer.

"I will see him," murmured the young man.

"Shall I ask him to walk up here ?"

"No, thank you. He can have nothing to say I do not wish you and Mr. Billington to hear. I would rather he spoke before you ; I shall feel stronger if you are by,"

She put her fat, white hand on his lean, brown fingers. "I know what's in your heart. I should feel just as you do. There's no need to say any more ; only remember this, you have always a home with the master and me."

He clasped her hand tightly, and gazed in her face, a wild light in his grey eyes. "If you know what is in my heart, you know that I can never forget nor forgive," he said, in a low, grinding voice.

"*I should never forget nor forgive,*" she replied, grimly.

When Stephen, following his hostess, entered the parlour, the vicar rose hastily and took his hand, trying to say a sympathetic word ; but his feelings mastered him ; he could not speak, and in silence went back to his chair. The young man sat down exactly opposite the fire, which cast a rosy gleam on his face, and so prevented the vicar from seeing the change there. A painful hush ensued ; every one stared at the fire.

“Steäve, my lad,” said the farmer presently, tapping his pipe on the bars of the grate, thereby shaking out the fresh tobacco he had just put in. “Steäve, my lad, the vicar has took a botherin’ errand on hisself; he’s come with a message for you from Mr. Thane.”

“I am ready to hear it,” said Stephen, quietly.

Thereupon, with much hesitation, choosing first one word and then another, in his desire to make the message tender, yet clear, the vicar went through his task. Stephen listened in absolute silence until the end, looking straight before him. When the vicar had ended he spoke—

“Sir, you are very good to have brought this message; you will be so good as to take my answer back. It is this. I can receive nothing from Mr. Thane; neither money nor good words. Tell him I thank him for his offer, as well as for all his former kindness to me, but I can take nothing—it would be the price of my sister’s death.”

"My boy, my boy," cried the vicar, unchecked tears rolling down his cheeks. "I blame myself for that. Why did I not teach my people better—care for them more?"

The farmer mopped his eyes furtively with his big red pocket-handkerchief. Mrs. Billington, the immovable, felt a mist cloud her serene orbs; but Stephen remained hard and tearless.

"Sir," he said, turning his eyes on Mr. Evelyn, "you are not to blame. How can you help it if men are born brutes? God has made them to grovel, and grovel they will."

"No, no, Stephen!" quavered the vicar, in great distress. "God has not made them to grovel, but to aspire."

"It is marvellous, then, how few fulfil their destiny," replied he, bitterly. "But we shall not agree on this subject, so I will say no more; only I cannot have you blame yourself; whatever blame there may be is

mine. I knew that his eyes had rested on her ; his—whose mere look was defilement—and yet I did not guard her. You did your duty, sir ; you warned me not to neglect mine. I did not heed ; and this is the end.” He bent down, and again stared in the fire.

“ Well, Steäve, we’re all on us wise when a thing has happened. I don’t try to comfort you, for I know there is no comfort ; you’ve jest got to grin an’ bear it, as fur as I can see. ’Tis a queer life this, when you comes to think on’t, an’ one as there don’t seem no reason in at times. I s’pose somehow the next’ll put it all straight.” The farmer twisted uneasily in his chair as he spoke.

“ Yes,” said the vicar, earnestly. “ I am sure the crooked will be made straight in the next life.”

Stephen was silent, nor did he again speak until the vicar had departed. That good man went home sorely troubled at his non-success, distressed at Stephen’s present

state of mind, and vaguely fearful of the future.

The same evening Stephen announced to his host and hostess the resolution he had taken. "I must go away ; I must go away at once," he said, rising from the chair, where he had long sat meditating, and going to the farmer.

"Nonsense, Steäve, I won't hear o' such a thing."

"Yes, I must go away. You and Mrs. Billington have been good to me, so good I can never find words to thank you ; but——" Here he stopped, his voice failing from emotion.

"Däne it, lad, don't talk like that ; I only found a good, useful horse a leetle out o' condition, an' jest brought 'un up here to get round."

The ghost of a smile dawned on Stephen's face. "Ah, well ! he has got round now, and, like an ungrateful animal, wants to run away ; but he will never forget the refuge he found, nor the hands that fed him."

"The hands as have got him means to hold him," said the farmer, chuckling.

Stephen looked at his hostess. She rose and came to her husband. "Master," she said, quietly, "Stephen is quite certain that as long as he's content to stay, we are glad to have him; but if he feels he's better away, doing his old work, he is right to go."

"Thank you, Mrs. Billington; that's just the case. I must get to my own work again. I think of going to the North; there are plenty of manufacturers there; and I am certain of employment. I should be very grateful if you would take the poor old dog Juno for me till I come back, if I ever do. I would take him myself, but I can't; I must be alone."

"To be sure we'll take the poor beast, glad to have 'un. An' I s'pose Jäne's right about your goin', she mostly sees pretty clear wi' them blue eyes o' her'n; so I'll say no more, barrin' that you'll allus know where to look for a home an' a hearty welcome."

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE EVE OF DEPARTURE.

“Vendetta boccon di Dio!”

*Italian Proverb.*

HAVING determined on leaving Hillford, Stephen went back to his cottage for a few days, in order to pack his books, sell his furniture, and arrange his affairs. Juno and his books he sent to the Grange; his furniture he sold in a lump to Purton, the carpenter; and his affairs he left in the hands of Mr. Billington. He had put by a good sum of money, which he committed to the farmer's keeping, only charging him to pay Dame Queckett a weekly dole, and hardly caring for the note of hand Mr. Billington insisted on giving him.



Everything belonging to his lost sister he destroyed, except one treasure—a little, cheap portrait of Daphne Garland ; this he put with Phœbe's lock of hair ; the one a remembrance of the love he could never forget, as the other was an incentive to the revenge he would never forego.

Of all his own possessions he would take nothing with him but a few clothes and books. He hoped to be able to read again when he got to another place ; here, he could not read—neither body nor mind was quiet enough for reading. The self-forgetfulness, at once the necessity and the charm of reading, was impossible to him now. When he held a book before his eyes, and tried to comprehend its meaning, the pages always presented illustrations more or less distinct of a marble figure, lying prone, with long, clinging, wet hair ; and of a beautiful, dark face, scornful and defiant.

During his few days in the old home, so soon as it began to grow dusk, he went out.

for long, rapid walks ; going on and on, until when night was far advanced, he would return to the cottage, and, quite worn out, sink into a heavy slumber.

It was the eve of his departure ; and, as usual, he had walked many miles, but not so many as was his wont, for the church clock was just striking eleven, when, turning down the hill, he came, whether by desire or not he was uncertain, into the churchyard.

It was a dark, weird night. The south-west wind swept great masses of cloud across the sky, only to reveal thicker masses beneath ; it swayed the tall trees in the vicarage garden, until the sough of their branches sounded as the rush of the sea ; and it wailed grievously among the acacias bordering the churchyard, raining their yellow leaves in showers upon the quiet graves.

The grey church and white gravestones were but faintly visible in the dim light, and Stephen trod carefully between the turfey hillocks till he came to his mother's grave.

He had tired himself into a sort of calm, and standing there, remembering who lay beneath, he half forgot the present in visions of the past. He saw a long-legged boy running to church ; saw the same boy in the choir, looking eagerly down among the people for a glad woman's face ; saw him kneel in devout earnestness before the bishop, while apart the mother prayed ; saw the two come for the boy's first communion, and for one instant felt the same unquestioning faith as did the boy. With a great start he came back to himself. What an awful abyss lay between the boy who believed and the man who doubted ! Were they the same being ? Up to a very late period he had, among all his doubtings, preserved his belief in the final straightening of the crooked, sweetening of the bitter, and righting of the wrong ; and thus still acknowledged life to be the gift of God. But the possibility of such a belief was over. What was life ? A mad race, in which the well-shod ever outstripped the bare-footed ; a frantic

game, in which the strong always won everything from the weak, or if by chance one of these latter came to the fore, he immediately changed sides and began to cheat his former comrades.

With this thought came another vision. The boy was older, had indeed become a man, and beside him, instead of the matron's figure, was a childish form, with a gay step and laughing face. He saw her in her girlish pride, her prettiness, her grace; he heard his mother commend her to his care with her latest breath. "Steeve, you'll take care o' Phœbe, and bring her safe to me?" and his reply, "I promise you I will." How had he kept his promise? How, if the dead did meet—how had the mother met her child? Poor, little, foolish Phœbe! so fair, so vain; had she recognized her in the solemn being who so soon had gone to her? Would the mother understand it all? He understood so well; knew how simply she had listened to the man's deceitful words; how utterly she

had trusted him. The hackneyed story, whose plot is a passing amusement for the man; death, at any rate moral death, for the woman—had in this instance been told to its most tragic conclusion. And Stephen, living over those hours by the river, felt the agony, the despair that must have crushed the girl's soul. To him, who knew so well how Phœbe had always shrunk from pain, with what horror she had ever regarded death; the thought of the suffering she must have endured ere she sought death for herself was maddening. The actual fact of the suicide did not trouble him much; he had often discussed its criminality or non-criminality with Lux Garland, in time past, and the two rash youths had professed themselves adherents to the stoic belief concerning it, allowing it to be a cowardly act; but declaring that since we are here by no will of our own, we are at liberty to depart if we please. As to its criminality in the eyes of the law, this they pronounced absurd. The words of a great writer of to-day

would entirely have expressed their sentiments on this subject : "A society which accords to its members perfect liberty of emigration, cannot reasonably pronounce the simple renunciation of life to be an offence against itself."

Thus it was the simple fact of the girl's suffering which weighed so heavily on Stephen's mind. "I could have forgiven him if he had murdered her, rather than I can for causing the misery which compelled her to this." Thus he cried, while the wind moaned round the church as though spirits in pain unutterable were whirled along the blast. A storm was at hand ; but the tempest without was as nothing to that within him. "All the devils in hell are abroad!" he muttered. Then after a pause, "Fool! there are no such things; men are the one, earth the other."

The rush of wild thought was too much for him ; he sank down beside his mother's grave, and lay there unconscious. Remembering

this night and the months which followed it in the after-time, Stephen believed himself to have been actually mad.

At length he came to himself and rose from the grass, trying to get some distinct thought out of the chaos in his mind. His hair, wet with night dews, hung over his brow; he raised his hand to push it away. At the touch, the vow he had made on that other damp hair came to his memory. Here was something to steady him; something to live for. He had sworn to have—what? Justice? No; that was but a fair mirage, vanishing at one's approach; a tantalus fruit bough, ever waving out of reach. No; he would have something sure. Revenge!

“Mother, your child shall be avenged!” he whispered, folding his hands upon the headstone.

Phoebe was not there to hear his vow. It was well, for she might have been troubled thereat; it would have recalled her wrong, and he would wish her to sleep peacefully,

forgetting all her woe. She lay in the cemetery above Hillford Wood, apart from the town, apart from the rush of factory life, apart from the cruel comments, of chattering tongues. Only a few children with hands full of flowers strayed thither, wandering dreamily among the sparsely strewn graves; or black-robed women crept there, carrying rose trees to plant in the little gardens where they fondly believed they had already sown immortal seed. Surely the girl could rest there, where only the air of heaven breathed over the grass, or if at rare intervals malice spoke, she spoke whisperingly, as if ashamed.

Stephen's mind only glanced for an instant at his sister's resting-place, and returned to its former meditations; however unhinged it might be, it yet retained its natural capacity for grasping a purpose. The obscure mill-manager had this in common with the leaders of men—that, having an aim, no work, no sacrifice was to be spared for the attain-



ment of that aim; moreover, he had the entire belief in himself which inspires others with the like. The man who holds confidently to his purpose, sure that the means he uses are needful, not asking himself, can I? shall I? ought I? is always the successful man. If a man begin to question with himself, like Rienzi, he fails. Whether to fail nobly be not better than to succeed basely, is beside the subject here, but may be profitably considered on the steps of the Ara Cœli under the bright Roman sun.

Stephen's purpose had certainly been a good one: the teaching and refining of the people. At this he had aimed for some years. About the means he employed to his end, there was considerable diversity of opinion in Hillford; most people, indeed, followed the curate in strongly denouncing them, but some were doubtful, and a few altogether approving. There could be no question about one thing in anybody's mind, that Stephen was becoming

a local leader, and some folks believed he would in time achieve national renown. The disadvantages of an imperfect education, they declared to have been successfully overcome by men assuredly not superior to this man in ability; and great things they prophesied of their hero. Perhaps, had circumstances been other than they were, these prophets might have seen—the fulfilment of their predictions.

Stephen himself had never dreamed of any circumstance strong enough to make him forego his cherished purpose and take another.

Yet so it was now. He was himself, yet not himself. Just as a fruit tree in thick blossom, giving fair promise of autumn treasures, if it were suddenly lopped below the graft, would send out only wild shoots, according to its original nature; so Stephen's aspirations—born of thought and culture—were cut off at a stroke, and the native fierce-

ness of the man burst forth into a passionate desire of revenge.

“Vendetta boccon di Dio!” say the Italians, and as such it now appeared to Stephen. He believed it would be to him sweeter than food to the starving, sweeter than drink to the thirsty, sweeter than kisses between long-parted lovers.

When at length, weary of his vigil, he left the churchyard and climbed the hill to his dismantled cottage, the threatened storm was coming on apace; vivid lightning flashed across the sky, peals of thunder rolled around. From his window, commanding the valley, he gazed on the black space below, which was every now and then illuminated with the brightness of day; and in the midst of the angry tempest, when the little house quivered and trembled as if appalled, he thought “Nature has heard and is recording my vow.”

Next day the sun shone gloriously, and the earth, washed pure by the downpour of the

night, smiled back at her lord, forgetful of the terrors she had endured ; robins sang in the hedgerows, larks in the open fields ; while along the Burley road a man walked silent and alone.

## CHAPTER X.

## LUCK COMES TO LUX.

"Fortune brings in some boats that are not steered."

*Cymbeline*, Act IV. Scene iii.

LUX GARLAND took very kindly to a life of indolence; even resigning himself to the inferior cooking of the Croft with but an occasional ejaculation of horror. As to his impecunious condition, he had been too accustomed to that at Oxford, where he was always needing money, to feel it here at Hillford, where the most lavish of mortals would find it difficult to spend a sovereign in the course of a week. But though he bore his own and his family's pennilessness thus calmly, he could not bear the remembrance of his debt to Geoffrey in like fashion.

The thought of it, however, usually occurred to him only in the lender's presence; when Geoffrey was out of sight, his friend's galling sense of obligation was out of mind. Lux, like most indolent people, could rest in the present, oblivious of the past, regardless of the future. Daphne vexed her soul concerning that debt far more than did her brother; but she never mentioned it to him, both out of tenderness to his feelings and her own ears. Lux was not easily put out, but when he was, he called upon the gods somewhat vehemently.

Daphne was beyond measure glad to have him at home; she hardly knew how she would have lived through this time without Lux and his easy philosophy, which, untouched now by Stephen's earnestness, grew easier every day. Sometimes she wondered that he could be content with the life he led—a life whose uniformity was diversified only by occasional cricketing and shooting and perpetual smoking; but she marvelled only, she

did not blame. If she could but earn money herself! This was her constant thought. The family exchequer was lower than ever. How winter garments were to be bought was a more puzzling question than it had been last autumn. She looked at the children's worn suits and her own shabby dresses, with spirits as low as her mother's purse. If she could but earn money! ever so little; yet money! How often she went to sleep and waked again with this thought! It grew so persistent as to drive away the memory of the vain and impotent conclusion of her own, and the mysterious and awful conclusion of another's, love story. She seemed to be grovelling in the dust; but, alas! the dust did not become golden, as she desired. She forgot her cares sometimes, of course, especially when she took a long walk with Lux, or went to practice on her ever-beloved organ. She never rowed now; the river was spoilt for her, and even Lux could not go down it without a shudder.

One wet morning, towards the end of October, when breakfast at the Croft was over, so far as everybody but Lux was concerned; when Mrs. Garland had gone to the kitchen to deliver her daily homily on the ever-interesting subject of dinner—a homily which, it must be confessed, she had frequently to put into practice with her own hands; and when Daphne was gathering together her reluctant pupils for lessons; Mr. Evelyn, in great coat and galoshes, came blithely through the pelting rain. Daphne, seeing him pass the dining-room windows, ran out in the hall to welcome him, and to help him doff his wet coat. He let her perform the office, and then, putting his hands on her shoulders, he looked into her face with his old, sunny smile.

“I have had a letter from Phil, containing some very good news. Try if you can guess what news,” he said, his voice brimful of gladness.

“He is well enough to come to England,” ventured the girl.



A slight cloud passed over the vicar's face.  
"No, no; that is not near it; guess again."

"He is going to be married."

"There's a woman's guess; but it is wrong; try again," he cried, gaily, his eyes twinkling.

Daphne grew cold. Her tongue seemed suddenly made of lead. But there was the vicar gazing at her; she must speak; she called up all her courage. "Then it is Captain Evelyn who is going to be married," she said.

"How the child's thoughts run on marrying! Good morning, Mrs. Garland; I am an early visitor you see."

The latter part of his speech was addressed to the lady of the Croft, who, with her sleeves turned up, and a large, blue-checked apron tied over her dress, came out of the kitchen, looking a better housewife than she actually was. At sight of the vicar she pulled down her sleeves, took off her apron, and led the way into the dining-room.

"I am the bearer of good news, Mrs.

Garland," said the vicar, standing in front of the fire and beaming down the room. "I set this daughter of yours guessing, but she has made the very widest shots; she will persist in thinking the news concerns one of my nephews. Can you help her guess?"

"It is something about Lux," said Mrs. Garland, confidently.

"There! the mother guesses at once. Yes, it is about Lux. Phil's friend, Lord Limpet, offers him a private secretaryship. It will give him a good position and three hundred a year."

Daphne stood in a sort of maze. She heard her mother's tearful thanks, saw the children cluster round in half-ignorant delight, but could not realize this good fortune. After being so used to disappointments, after the terrors of a few minutes ago, to have anything really pleasant to contemplate, was in fact bewildering.

"Angels and ministers of grace, what has happened?" said Lux, coming leisurely into

the room. "You all look as if you had been to the funeral of your worst enemy, and had thought it decent to weep, though you could not help smiling."

"Oh, Lux!" gasped his mother, as the young man shook hands with Mr. Evelyn.

"Well, what is it, mother? Your face out-Aprils Virgil's own."

"Oh, my boy, what a thing this is! So much better than I hoped."

"What is better? Not the breakfast. Certainly that is not better than *I* hoped," said Lux, taking a discontented survey of the breakfast-table through his eye-glass.

"Tell him, mother, or else I shall have to. I can't keep it in much longer," cried Hec.

"Have pity upon him, mother; he is quite swelling with suppressed words. One would take him for a girl," said Lux.

Thus adjured, Mrs. Garland made a great effort after perspicacity. "It is all Mr. Evelyn's doing. He is the truest friend you have ever had—we have all ever had, I

mean. So, you see, everything has happened for the best. Of course, I should like you to have had a fellowship ; but it wouldn't have been worth so much as this."

"Not worth so much as what?" asked Lux, a little wearily.

Mr. Evelyn came to Mrs. Garland's assistance. "I have just had a letter from Phil, containing an offer to you of Lord Limpet's private secretaryship. The position, you know, is a good one; the salary is three hundred a year."

In real emotion, Lux seized the vicar's hands, the languor gone from his manner, the eye-glass from his eye. "Mr. Evelyn, you have been more than a father to me. My father only ushered me into an already too crowded world; you have found me a comfortable niche therein."

"My boy, I am quite as pleased as you are," said the vicar, not heeding the exact meaning of Lux's words. "It seems to me just the thing for you. The only regret

I have is, that Lord Limpet should be a Liberal; but he is not an ultra-Liberal. Phil, in fact, calls him a Liberal-Conservative, which name has to me a most anomalous sound: there is a ring of compromise in it that does not suit my old-fashioned ears."

"Lord Limpet will suit me exactly," returned Lux, gravely. "I always said that if ever I adopted a political creed, it should be Liberal-Conservative. You call it a compromise; an anomaly. So it is. But then life is a compromise, the world an anomaly; and politics, having to deal with these, should, I think, match them."

"Well, well," said the vicar, slowly shaking his head—his usual gesture when he did not quite approve of what he heard; "we will not discuss politics, Lux; they are not in your line, I know, and I never think anything of any man's opinion on a subject he has not studied. I would much rather hear your convictions as to the authorship of the

Homeric poems than your fancies concerning politics; for with the Greek text you have, I know, a most intimate acquaintance, and could, I believe, fight Wolf on his own ground; but of the political history of your own country since the Revolution, you know nothing at all."

This was very severe for the vicar; but really he felt that young Oxford was becoming appallingly self-assertive; as dogmatic and dictatorial after its own new fashion, as were the schoolmen of the middle ages after their old one.

"You are quite right," said Lux, with a slight shrug of his shoulders; "I know nothing, none of our men know anything, of the history of England. As to the period you mention, I could just tell you that the battles of Blenheim and Waterloo were fought in it, and that is about all."

"Then I advise you to cram," said the Vicar, drily. "It is possible Lord Limpet may expect from his secretary some slight

knowledge of the statesmen, and the Acts of Parliament, during the last hundred and seventy years. But now, my boy, you want to eat your breakfast, so good-bye. Come down to me presently."—"Young Oxford! young Oxford, indeed! A set of callow youths, each of whom believes himself to carry an exhaustive theory of the universe in his waistcoat pocket," observed the good man to himself, as he ambled through the rain.

"Hurrah! the luck of Lux the luckless has changed!" cried that hero, returning to the dining-room after he had accompanied the vicar to the door.

The boys shouted in chorus, Daphne embraced Virgilia, and the two danced merrily round the room, while Mrs. Garland, first kissing her son tenderly, went to get him some hot coffee.

The preparing Lux for departure proved an absorbing occupation, employing Daphne so constantly as to allow her but little time for dwelling on the vacuum her brother's absence

would make. Of course, Mr. Evelyn supplied funds for the secretary's outfit, and, of course, the mother and sister worked diligently to economize these, that their knight should not set out on his adventures unarmed with the weapon, the invincible sword, the Excalibur of the nineteenth century—gold.

Directly Geoffrey Thane heard of the good fortune which had befallen his friend, he came down to the Croft, full of congratulations for the family generally. Yet, as he offered them, he did not hesitate to pronounce this secretaryship to be infinitely below the position Lux would have held had he taken honours. No one was inclined to dwell on this view of the question, and the embryo cleric, finding regrets and remorse at a discount, became so agreeable as occasionally to delude Daphne into forgetfulness of the embarrassing episode which had marred their intercourse.



## CHAPTER XI.

## THE MARRIED PAIR.

“Felices ter et amplius  
Quos irrupta tenet copula.”

HORACE, *Car.* Lib. I. 13.

THE winter in Italy proved very agreeable to the newly married pair. The early part of it they spent in Florence, and when the air of that city began to grow crisp, they went on to Rome.

Neither of the two was in the faintest degree archæologist, artist, nor poet; and Rome was to neither the “city of the soul.” But herein they did not differ much from hundreds of other visitors to the eternal city; visitors who crowd there every winter, either because it is a place one must see, or because

it is a gay winter residence. How can Rome be the "city of the soul" to those who have no soul? no poetic, no artistic, no even archæologic soul? Yet over these soulless ones—over these to whom the great past is nothing, if known, and often is entirely unknown—over these, Rome throws some of that magical, mysterious glamour of hers. Our newly married pair, after a week or two, succumbed to this influence, and gave themselves up to the Anglo-Roman life as if they were by no means making their first experience of it.

English women, as well as American women, are invariably courted in Rome, even if not very beautiful nor very rich. Naturally, when so lovely and so magnificent a creature as Henrietta appeared, the homage paid her was unbounded. Did she, in the grounds of the Villa Borghese or the Villa Doria-Pamfili, dismount from her horse, or descend from her carriage, to stroll with the fashionables over the turf—bright with many-hued anemones

and cyclamens—she was the admired of all admirers. Did her carriage draw up with others on the Pincio at the hour of the Ave Maria, that its occupants might behold the sun set in rose, crimson, orange, and golden glory behind the purple dome—a crowd of men gathered round it, eager for a bow and a word from *la bellissima forestiera*. At receptions, balls, and at the Apollo, it was the same; she was surrounded by cavaliers. Three English nobodies, five German artists, an ancient French count, with titled Italians innumerable, fell desperately in love with her; some of them actually remaining constant for a couple of months: indeed, one little enraptured marchese was in but poor spirits until next season brought other fair Englishwomen to Rome.

All this outspoken admiration and homage entertained Oswald exceedingly. It was too frank to cause him the least twinge of jealousy; besides, while to the full enjoying the sensation she made, Henrietta belonged

to that type of Englishwoman said by certain novels and newspapers to be fast dying out—the woman who flirts systematically until she is married, but after that becomes the dignified wife, whom, indeed, men may admire, but always at a safe distance.

They were very well matched, these two, in other things than beauty; they had very similar tastes, very similar antipathies; above all, by reason of their long companionship, they understood each other perfectly, and thus, those little misconceptions, which often acidulate the honeymoon, were by them entirely avoided.

Oswald made the most devoted husband, Henrietta the most charming wife. If after a morning's sight-seeing, Henrietta, so soon as lunch was over, would, in the interests of her beauty, retire for sleep; Oswald would go down to the smoking-room, or out in the Piazza, and smoke persistently until it was time to start for the sunset drive. The round of gaiety was pleasant to both; it was what

Henrietta had always desired ; while to Oswald it was agreeable, by reason of its novelty. Certainly he sometimes sighed for his forsaken hunting and shooting ; or, when he and his wife took a ride over the Campagna, he bitterly compared their hired steeds with the fine animals in the Thaneleigh stable ; but in his heart he never wished himself back. England was, to his mind's eye, pervaded by a thicker gloom than even calumniating foreigners bestow on it ; and he thanked the Moeræ that he was away in the sun.

March passed, April came ; yet still he lingered. He saw the English troop away in battalions, but did not move. He received entreaties from his father to return, and disregarded them. " Let business go to the devil ! I am well here ; " he thought to himself. At length Henrietta declared for England ; her desires he could not disregard, and, however unwilling, began to make preparations for flight.

It was the beginning of May when they

turned their backs on the wondrous city—on the magic sunsets, the charmed air, on the gorgeous Judas trees, the clustered honeysuckles, the pink carnations, the roses of a thousand hues ; on the fresh green fronds of the *capelli di Venere*, clothing fountain and pedestal with the robe of spring ; on the ruins, the statues, the pictures ; and on the purple dome.

The sun shone brightly enough on the day of their arrival in Hillford ; but the east wind, whose existence they had forgotten, blew cruelly, causing Oswald to shrug his shoulders, and Henrietta to congratulate herself on having worn her velvet and furs. At the station they were welcomed by Geoffrey, and by him conducted to the carriage which drove up the hill, while the church bells rang joyfully. Mr. Thane had not chosen to extend the rejoicings at the return of the married pair outside his own park gates ; and had quietly set aside his wife's proposal of floral arches in the street. The town, therefore, had not put

on a festal appearance; and except that groups of people stood here and there, hoping to get a good view of the future master of Thaneleigh and his beautiful wife, there was no sign of any important event.

One opinion only was pronounced on Henrietta—she was lovely; and such indeed was the case. With the faint pink tinge on her cheeks, which gave such lustre to her eyes, she leaned forward in the carriage, to bow a graceful response to every greeting accorded her. Oswald was said to look tired, because he was pale, and there was an anxious far-seeking glance in his eyes, as he scanned the waiting groups.

At the park gates the actual welcome began, for within them were congregated all the Thaneleigh workpeople. As on the wedding day, they had feasted themselves into excellent humour; and were ready to give a truly British cheer as the carriage drove into the park, amidst much hurrahing, waving of handkerchiefs, and loud commenting on the

beauty of the young mistress. The carriage went on to the house, leaving the spectators to declare Mr. Oswald and his wife to be the handsomest couple ever seen in Hillford. Some of the old folks, indeed, shook their heads, and said the young ones could not remember the marriage of Mr. Thane with his first wife; but this comparison was ascribed to the craze of old folks generally concerning things of the past.

So the people talked, amusing themselves; all but a very few quite forgetful of the humble grave in the cemetery on the hill beyond, where the sun shone as brightly as here. Who remember the dead when eight months have passed? Hardly their nearest and dearest. How should their mere neighbours and acquaintances have longer memories? The few who did think of that lowly grave were men who had held Stephen Carr in great admiration, and who now wondered where he had gone, and if he knew of this man's return. Stephen had faded from the Hillford



world, as entirely as the dead Phoebe. No one in the town had the least idea of his present dwelling-place. It was suspected that Mr. Billington was aware of it; but if he were, he never revealed the secret, nor indeed, except to his wife, ever breathed the young man's name.

While the people cheered and talked, the carriage went briskly on to the hall door, where stood Mr. and Mrs. Thane, to welcome their children. With tender, chivalrous affection, the father advanced and greeted Henrietta, while Mrs. Thane showered smiles on Oswald. Then Mr. Thane turned to his son. There was nothing in his father's look or manner to remind Oswald of their last interview; yet it was present in startling clearness to his mind. In fact, ever since touching the shores of England, the gloom he dreaded had rested on him, making it very difficult for him to answer his wife's bright talk, or to simulate an interest in their surroundings. As now from the hall

door, he looked on the pleasant scene before him, the gaiety seemed hollow, the welcome false; he almost expected these smiling faces to vanish, and a gibing, yelling crowd to surround him.

As he gazed, his wife laid her hand on his arm. "Why, Oswald, what is the matter? One would think you did not appreciate meeting our dear old English friend, the east wind," she said, laughingly.

"He is tired out with smiling and bowing," interposed Geoffrey, who had been struck by the paleness of his brother's face, and was anxious to spare him any questioning. Perhaps Geoffrey remembered, even more vividly than Oswald, the reception accorded to the Thaneleigh carriage eight months ago.

"I have done as much bowing and smiling as Oswald, and I am not tired," said Henrietta.

"It is the *rôle* of your sex to be agreeable," retorted Geoffrey. "A woman can smile and

bow when an east wind is blowing and she has got a stiff neck. Her face is never an index of her mind."

"Which only proves how superior woman is to circumstances—to little personal discomforts, at which man fumes or sulks," said Henrietta, gaily, as they passed on into the house.

The young couple were to remain at Thaneleigh until a house their father was building for them should be finished. This house had reached a stage when it was desirable the opinion of the future owners should be taken as to colouring, decorating, and, after a little while, furnishing. Mr. Thane had urged his son's return, very much on account of the house, and now he had returned, both he and his wife found constant occupation in deciding on cornices, mantelpieces, pavings, tinting, and gilding.

Henrietta was very glad to stay at Thaneleigh, instead of immediately setting up an

establishment of her own. The splendid rooms, the luxurious surroundings, the hot-houses, the stables, were all dear to her, and, if they occupied a secondary place in her heart, the love and admiration of her new parents were by no means valueless to her. She had been used to each and all of these for years, and by reason of Mrs. Thane's extreme deference to her opinion, she felt herself almost mistress at Thaneleigh already. She, of course, helped to make her own position agreeable by her perpetual amiability. She was by nature a good-tempered person, or as Lux Garland would have said, had a liver in perfect condition. Doubtless, constitution had much to do with it; but her excessive regard for her dignity had something to do with it too. She would never compromise that by any weak display either of anger or sullenness.

Oswald was happy in having a wife with such a disposition; being by no means a serene person himself. He was easily irri-

tated, and when irritated did not conceal his feelings. Genial, and even fascinating in society, he was difficult and captious at home; indeed, under other circumstances, he might easily have become one of the class tersely described as "street saints and house devils." But during his married life he had grown milder. The taming process had begun, and would, perhaps, in the course of years, be perfected. The great fear was lest Henrietta should lose her influence over him through her very passionlessness. He was as affectionate as he was irritable; she as cold as she was calm. Their union was something like the blending of ice with fire; in which blending it was possible the fire might heat the ice, but it was also possible the ice might extinguish the fire.

The pair were the objects of much interest and attention in Hillford and the neighbourhood, for, though they had been married eight months, they were, in a manner, yet bride and bridegroom. They

found Hillford just as they had left it, except for the departure of Lux Garland from the Croft, and of Stephen Carr from his cottage on Tory. Concerning the latter, Henrietta once asked her uncle why Stephen had given up the managership of the factory, and where he now was; but she was easily satisfied with his evasive answers, not being much interested either in business matters or the doings of her inferiors. About Lux Garland she was much more inquisitive, questioning Daphne in the friendliest way, and listening interestedly to the secretary's gay letters.

"I only wish he would come home," said Daphne, one day, with a sigh, as she finished reading to Henrietta an absurd little note she had just received. "You can't tell from this whether he really likes it; for if he were going to be executed he would joke all the same."

At this time a letter came from Lux, which his sister read to no one in its entirety. It mentioned, in a matter-of-fact way, that

Captain Evelyn had come to England on business, and had invited the much over-worked secretary to accompany him to Evelynhurst. At the reading of this the girl's face grew rosy, and that which she thought dead fluttered at her heart. Would he come to Hillford? What if he did? One question succeeded the other, answering it cruelly. No; she had not any reason to desire his coming. Had he not gone from her without a word? Was there any evading the significance of that fact? Yet, notwithstanding her conviction of his indifference, notwithstanding her woman's pride, she half hoped he might come. But in a few days the vicar went to town, and, returning, spoke no word of a possible visit from Jack.

## CHAPTER XII.

## HILLFORD WOOD.

“Oh, the earl was fair to see.”

TENNYSON, *The Sisters*.

THE east wind at length tired itself out; not, indeed, until Nature had long been aweary of it, and man cursed it angrily. In ecstasy at its departure, earth adorned herself with the fairest garments of the May, not even now, in her old age, unwilling to flaunt it bravely, when possible. The chestnut trees, whose leaves had hung sulkily shivering in the cruel blast, spread themselves out fanlike, while their white cones of blossom expanded, showing tender dashes of pink on the petals, like the colour on a maiden's cheek. The



lilacs had experienced too hard a struggle to recover themselves at this late period, so they curled up their withered flowers, and retired until the next spring. The laburnums fared better; they had not been so forward in displaying their beauty as the lilacs, consequently, they had not suffered so severely, and now unfurled their golden banners in triumph. When the laburnums faded, the syringas opened their orange-scented clusters, and the guelder-roses tossed snowy balls aloft. Not in the rich man's shrubberies alone was there rejoicing, but abroad in the woods and copses, where the flowers, so long checked, now bloomed abundantly. Hillford Wood was a fairyland of beauty. True, the primroses, violets, bluebells, and anemones were over; they had had a cold time of it, and were not sorry to depart; but the wood-sorrel, woodruff, and, above all, the Solomon's seals, were blossoming, and everywhere the lady-fern uncurled her tender fronds.

It was past six o'clock. The sun, though

not yet near the horizon, was declining thither. The light grew golden. Round the first hawthorn flowers the bees had all day long hummed dreamily; now they went to rest in garden-hive or hollow tree. Down the river-side of the wood all day long pale May-flies had sported; now they were at rest in the maw of some voracious fish, or floating, stark and dead, on the Aire's defiled waters. All day long the chaffinches had gone on piping their eternal, "twit, twit, twit, twit, spider!" now they were composing themselves on their neat little nests of moss and lichen.

It was past six o'clock, and the nightingales began to gurgle a few soft notes, as if tuning their voices for that full burst of rapture which seems to have been learnt in a happier world than this. But listen! the singer suddenly changes his measure; tender, melancholy, long-drawn-out notes succeed the ecstatic song—a touch of earth's sadness in the pæan of love and joy.

The nightingales had just begun to sing, when, through the wood, with quick steps, came a man, whistling softly. It was Oswald Thane, returning from a visit to the keeper's cottage, where he had been inspecting the first broods of young pheasants, and listening to Trimmer's account of the different characters of his hens. Some of these patient creatures were already step-mothers of children more patrician than themselves; some were sitting in expectation of being similarly blessed. Oswald had lingered with the keeper, pleasantly anticipating next season's sport, until, looking at his watch, he discovered the lateness of the hour.

"I must go, Trimmer. It is nearly half past six, and my father hates waiting for dinner. I will see you about turning down those rabbits to-morrow." So saying, he nodded to Trimmer, and took his way homewards.

Across the woodland path, the sun threw

here and there broad gleams of his magical farewell light. The young green of the beech changed to gold, the young russet of the oak to orange. Beneath these, the ivy, the ferns, and the mosses were flecked with radiant spots, while an occasional golden shaft pierced the wood's deepest recesses.

Oswald did not care very much for Nature, except so far as she assisted him in his favourite sports; apart from them, she was but little to him. The companionship of men, and especially of women, the gaiety, the life of cities, had infinitely more charms for him; and he always considered it a great nuisance that Fate had planted him in a country town. But at this moment Nature was so fair as to compel admiration.

"Italy is not more lovely than England to-day, I am sure; only we had weeks of such weather there, before we left it, while here——" He finished his soliloquy by a long whistle, and, having started, he whistled on for several minutes. Then he

again took out his watch. "Confound it! how late I shall be! and Henrietta hates to keep the governor waiting. Well, I must not attempt dressing, that's——Ha!" He started back in blank horror. Directly in his path, which at this point made a sudden turning, stood the man whose face had haunted his dreams for eight months past. Yes, it was the same face, pale, resolute, menacing.

Oswald was no coward, but the remembrance of that mysterious tragedy paralyzed him for a moment, and the two men stood, face to face, gazing at one another. As Oswald met the avenging eyes, his courage returned.

"Will you let me pass?" he said, in tones haughty enough; yet in spite of himself they quivered.

"I have come here purposely to meet you," said the other, never taking his eyes from Oswald's face.

"What do you want with me?" His voice was firmer now.

“What do I want with you? I want to fulfil a vow made in your hearing last September—a vow you have prevented me from fulfilling by flying abroad. I vowed to avenge my sister’s death. I swore it on this!” he said, taking from his breast the lock of hair Oswald remembered so well.

“Stephen,” said Oswald, with a shudder, and an emotion of true sorrow, “I was terribly to blame, I confess. But I swear to you that I knew nothing of the poor child’s motive for destroying herself. Of having actually caused her death, you cannot possibly believe me guilty.”

“Not guilty?—not guilty of her death? when your vile passion drove her to it—made life impossible to her? Oswald Thane, do you think to disarm me by declaring you did not actually murder my sister? Her murder I might have forgiven you; her dishonour I never will.” The speaker’s eyes gleamed fiercely; his hands were folded on his breast, where he had replaced the lock

of hair. "I am not here to bandy words with you," he continued; "I am here——"

His words were checked by a sudden movement from Oswald, who attempted to seize and throw his enemy. But Stephen was too quick to be thus surprised; he closed with Oswald, and in a few minutes, by dint of his mad strength, he threw him at full length on the earth. Oswald was considered a good wrestler, but who can wrestle successfully with a demon? Compelled to succumb, he lay, glaring at his conqueror.

"You will not rise," said Stephen, grimly, "until you have sworn to give me my revenge. I am not a murderer. I have no intention of murdering you; but fight me you shall! Do you swear?"

Oswald was silent a moment, but no longer; his blood was boiling; he would fight. "I swear!" he said.

"Then rise," returned the other, letting him free.

More crestfallen than he had ever appeared

in his life. Oswald arose from the earth. "What are we to fight with?" he demanded.

"With our fists, if I had my will; but you are no match for me there," said Stephen, with a grim smile. "Pistols will be more in your line, and give you the advantage. I have brought a pair." He took a pair of pistols from his pockets. "Choose!" he said, offering them to Oswald.

Oswald took a pistol and examined it carefully. Here he was at home. He had been used to firearms from his boyhood, and was a first-rate shot. It would be strange indeed if he did not now prove the better marksman of the two.

"It is not charged," he said, quietly.

"Neither is this one. We will charge them now," replied Stephen, producing balls and powder. "You will choose the number of paces," continued he.

"Fifteen," said Oswald. "The longer distance the better," he thought.

Stephen measured, counting aloud, and



then placed himself in position. There was something absolutely fiendish in Stephen's composure. It half chilled the red rage at Oswald's heart.

"We have no seconds. Who is to give the signal?" asked Oswald.

Stephen drew out his watch. "It wants five minutes to seven. We can hear the Thaneleigh clock distinctly in this spot. When it strikes the third beat,—fire."

Again they stood facing one another, while the five minutes ran out. Oswald gave no thought to the folly, the passion, which had placed him in this position; he felt only that there was no escape from it, and that in any case his wife would be enlightened as to the past. His wife! Ah! as the clock struck seven she would descend the great oak staircase in her radiant beauty; her silken dress would float behind her, and in her black hair and in her bosom would glow the red roses he had gathered for her a few hours ago. She would enter the dining-room, and, at

the same instant, his father would step in from the conservatory. They would look round for him, while he——. With a start he recalled his wandering wits, steadily placed himself, and examined his pistol.

The clock began to strike. Each man raised his arm. One, two, three! Each man fired. The flashes and reports were simultaneous. Stephen's right arm dropped to his side wounded, as Oswald, for the second time, fell prostrate on the ground.

For one instant Stephen stood aghast; the next, he rushed to his fallen enemy, and, with his one arm, made desperate attempts to staunch the blood flowing from a wound in the breast. Over the soft, green moss and the young ivy, the blood flowed, and as Stephen saw it he felt not only that Phœbe was avenged, but that in it her betrayer's sin was washed away.

With white lips he bent over the ghastly face of the stricken man, where, as the blood ceased flowing, he thought he saw a glimmer

of consciousness. "Forgive me!" he murmured. "I forgive you."

But there was no answer. One little flicker of the eyes, and then they went out into darkness. Senseless, motionless he lay, pillowed on moss and ivy, while from the beechen bough above him, a nightingale showered down a "rain of melody."

Stephen rose from his knees and gazed at his work; gazed at the pallid face, a few minutes ago superb in beauty and pride; gazed at the flaccid limbs, a few minutes ago instinct with life; finally, gazed again at the stream of blood. As if petrified, he stood, oblivious of the wife's, the father's anguish; oblivious of his own wound, his own danger: only concerned with one thought—his foe was dead—the man who had wrought evil in his house had paid the extremest penalty. That prostrate form with the damp hair, so cruelly present to his mind during the past eight months, had a fellow now. The humble girl was equal to the

proud man. There was a sound of voices near at hand. They were the voices of Trimmer and the under-keeper. The men had heard the reports of firearms, and, suspicious of poachers, had set out to inspect the wood. The voices came nearer; but Stephen did not heed them, nor move from his position by the lifeless man.

"God Almighty! what's this?" cried Trimmer, in frantic horror, recognizing at one glance his young master's face. Stephen did not answer, nor even look towards the men. "What's this? Who are you?" cried Trimmer, in a voice which terror made a scream.

The young man turned towards him. "I am Stephen Carr. I have fought a duel with your master, and have killed him. Take me to prison."

In a paroxysm of bewilderment and fright, Trimmer raised his gun to his shoulder and pointed it at Stephen.

"Shoot me, if you like. I have no quarrel

with you," said the young man, faintly. He had not heeded his wounded arm except for a moment, but the slow bleeding was beginning to tell on him.

"Give up your gun!" said the keeper.

"I have no gun. We fought with pistols; mine lies there." As he spoke he pointed to the place where the pistol had dropped from his hand.

"Have you quite killed him, you damned blackguard?" said Trimmer, bending over his master. "Here, Bill, run off at once to the house; get help and a doctor. Ah, wait!" He glanced uneasily at Stephen. Should he be safe to stay alone with the murderer?

"Your master is dead; but if you want the man to go for help, he can go. I have no quarrel with you, and, if I had, what chance should I have with this wounded arm?" It was indeed evident there could be no fear, for at this moment, Stephen, unable to stand, sank down at the foot of a tree.

"Go, Bill, run; don't lose a minute. But

be careful; don't let his father know," said Trimmer.

His father! A dull sense of pain touched Stephen's heart. Was the suffering only transferred? Had the acute wound only passed from himself to another? Would the blood which had quenched the fire in his soul be a fountain of anguish to some one else? So entirely absorbed had he been by his purposed revenge, he had never, in the event of Oswald Thane's death, taken his father into account at all. Not even when he saw the son's fair form stretched out on the moss. No, he had only remembered that other prostrate form, white, cold, humbled, with which this now was equal. In truth, Stephen had never imagined anything beyond the meeting with his foe. It was a thousand-fold more likely that Oswald would kill him than he Oswald. He was willing it should be so—and now?

## CHAPTER XIII.

## AFTER-THOUGHTS.

“ I have slain a man to my wounding,  
And a young man to my hurt.”

*Genesis iv. 23.*

THE fresh night air blowing full on Stephen's face, roused him from the lethargy into which he had fallen. He was seated in a cart, beside Sergeant Perks ; another policeman was behind them. The sergeant was driving very fast towards Burley. These were the facts to which he awoke.

As in a dream, he had beheld men come and bear away the silent form, upon which he yet gazed. As in a dream he had suffered himself to be led to the police-station, and there had allowed a doctor he did not know

to bind up his wounded arm. Then, still as in a dream, sensible of but little else than a feeling of exhaustion, he was lifted into the cart, it having been judged better that he should at once be sent on to Burley, to await examination before the magistrates; and Sergeant Perks getting up beside him, they drove away.

Now, raising his eyes for a moment, he marked the familiar road, and half wondered why he was being driven so quickly along it. Only for a moment did his thoughts dwell on his surroundings; these were of little consequence after what had occurred; enough matter for his thoughts in the event of two hours and a half ago. He had accomplished his burning desire, and behold! like all accomplished desires, it had lost its charm. The vengeance, so sweet in anticipation, had, in fulfilment, been sweet but for a moment; already, the after-taste had become bitter. His father! Those words had branded themselves on his memory.



All they signified flashed now upon him with the swiftness and clearness of lightning. The tender affection, the proud hopes, the sweet content, such a father must have for and in his son. These, he in his revenge had wounded to death. Not Oswald alone lay slain among the flowers; love, hope, and content were slain too. From the death of these could Mr. Thane ever recover? Asking himself this question, Stephen was forced to reply, "Never." He of the noble presence would become an image of eternal grief; he would go with bowed head to the grave. Could the life of the man who had killed his son make him any amends, he was welcome to that; but of what avail would it be? Would it give him back the dead? Had Oswald's death given back to Stephen his sister's fragile life? Ah God! it had not given back that other fragile thing he prized far more—her honour.

Again the young man roused himself and looked around him. They had reached

Burley; they were driving a little less rapidly than before. He lifted his heavy eyes to his companion. "You are sure he is dead?" he asked, in low tones.

"Yes, he is dead. Oh, Mr. Carr, to think you should have come to such a pass as this!" said Perks, with a choking sound in his voice.

"It doesn't signify about me; but his father!" returned Stephen, almost whisperingly.

"His father and his wife!" said Perks.

His wife! The words recalled all the wrong done to Phœbe, and again Stephen's mood changed. He had wrought a righteous vengeance, and if the innocent suffered with the guilty, could that be helped? That justice, in striking the sinner, should wound yet more cruelly the guiltless, was a part of the confusion of things in this mad world.

The cart arrived at the police-station and stopped. The three men dismounted, and, regardless of the astonished and horrified

looks bestowed upon him by the officials, Stephen followed Sergeant Perks along a dreary passage to a cell. At the door Perks paused.

“When shall I be brought before the magistrates?” asked Stephen, his voice ringing hollow within those stone walls.

“On Saturday,” returned the sergeant. “And, Mr. Carr, if you’ll tell me what friends and what lawyer you would like to consult, I’ll see to their being told.”

“I have no friends, and I do not wish to see a lawyer. Let the law take its own course. Only tell me what will the charge be against me?”

“Murder!” replied the sergeant, hoarsely.

“Murder!” gasped Stephen. Was it possible that he, Stephen Carr, was a murderer?

He spoke no more. In stupid acquiescence he entered the cell, sat down on the stone bench, and let Perks depart. He heard the great key turn in the heavy door, and it sounded like his final sentence. Making a

tremendous effort, he tried to collect his thoughts sufficiently to realize his guilt and its certain punishment. He knew the law. Duelling was by the law considered murder. But in some infatuated way he had never brought home to himself such a condition of things as the present. Always he had anticipated the moment of revenge, and stopped there. Of any sort of future life or death for himself after that, he had not dreamed. Now, the awful reality was before him, and from it he did not attempt to escape. He would be tried for murder, sentenced, and hanged. No, that should never be. To the last ignominy he would not submit. His wound was growing more and more painful. He would tear away the bandages and bleed to death. His left hand seized the wounded arm: one instant, and it had been laid bare, when the thought of Mr. Thane stopped the ruthless intent. Such revenge as he could he had taken on Oswald Thane. Should not the father in his turn

have revenge? If he suffered the shameful death of a murderer, the father would in some sort be content. That being the case, he would accept his doom; he would not try to cheat justice. Yet, what was justice? Not the thing talked of by lawyers and judges, and supposed to be meted out by juries. No; it was an intangible good, a fair thing dreamed of, never actually seen. Vengeance, too, was that any more real? When attained, what did it give? Could it alter the past? Alas! no. The past was irrevocable. No act, human or divine, could change it. God Himself was helpless before the past.

One thought succeeded another in Stephen's mind, as wild waves succeed each other on the shore, with ceaseless persistency. For a long time past, one idea had absorbed him; now he had become the sport of mad-denning myriads. There had always been a morbid tendency in the young man's mind, which circumstances might deepen, until it

was near akin to insanity : and these circumstances surrounded him now. One possessing idea, whether base or noble, usually develops a species of madness in the soul—only in the one case the madness is demoniac, in the other divine.

All through that night, in the black darkness, the dead stillness of his cell, Stephen sat, open-eyed, upon his bench. The pain of his wound was intense enough to chase away sleep, even had it not been scared by the agony of thought. And now there flashed across him the memory of the love which had once pervaded his being, but which had vanished before the presence of that fierce hatred. It was a strange memory here in prison, the memory of the fair, pure maiden ! yet, with painful minuteness he remembered every word, every look, every touch she had bestowed upon him. Ah ! the day he saved her from drowning, did she not kiss his hand ? His ! And, behold ! he had stained that very hand with blood. The thought

was too overwhelming. Faint with pain and horror, he fell back on the bench, and there remained in a half-delirious state until the door of his cell was opened, and a policeman, accompanied by a doctor, appeared.

Stephen looked up at his visitors without attempting to rise; and when he saw two unknown faces beside him, he turned to the wall, careless of the disgust on the surgeon's countenance at being compelled to touch the flesh of a murderer; especially of one who had attacked the whole manufacturing gentry in the person of Oswald Thane.

The surgeon's visit over, Stephen relapsed into a state of semi-consciousness. Again he was roused by the opening of that terrible door. Again he raised his eyes; this time to meet the sad eyes, the distressed face of Parson Evelyn. He started, and tried to sit up, but failing, dropped back on his bench. The vicar came close beside him and took his hand; as he did so, Stephen felt the parson's hand quiver.

"You must not take my hand," said the young man, in a faint voice, as he pulled away the offending member from the parson's grasp.

"O Stephen! Stephen! why did you let the devil come into your heart?" cried Mr. Evelyn.

"Why did I let the devil come into my heart? Because he was the only being who offered me vengeance," replied Stephen, quickly.

"'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, saith the Lord,'" ejaculated the parson, in solemn tones.

"When? Where?" cried Stephen, excitedly. "We see nothing beyond this life. Are we to go out into the unseen, still clamouring for that which never comes?"

"Stephen, this is terrible—this passionate desire for revenge. Are we not taught to bear our wrongs, to forgive our enemies?"

"There are some wrongs it is vile to bear; some enemies it is base to forgive. You call



me a murderer, you shrink at my touch. Was not he a murderer, too? Ay, a crueller one! I have killed only the worst part of him. Did he not kill the best part of her—the joy, the sweetness, the maidenhood?”

“I will not argue with you, Stephen; only one thing will I ask you. You scoff at the justice of God. Has your own revenge satisfied you?”

The young man raised himself on his bench, his eyes gleaming with fever. “No, it has not satisfied me, for it could not give me back what I had lost. Neither will Mr. Thane’s revenge on me satisfy him; but he shall have it. Had I not made up my mind to that, I would have torn away these bandages, and bled to death. But he shall not be cheated. He shall hang Stephen Carr, the would-be leader, the would-be teacher; he shall hang him as a common murderer.”

“No, no!” cried Mr. Evelyn, in intense emotion; “God is more merciful than we deserve. Stephen, Stephen! suppose your

shot had not been deadly ; suppose you were not a murderer ; should you be glad ? ”

“ Not deadly ! but I saw him dead. Tell me ! What is it ? ” gasped Stephen, stretching out his hands.

“ Would you be glad ? ” repeated Mr. Evelyn.

“ Glad ? Yes, for his father’s sake, and because this hand would not be defiled with blood. ” As he spoke, he clutched his right hand to his bosom.

The parson came near him. “ He is terribly wounded ; but the bullet has been extracted, and he is not dead. There is very little hope of his living ; yet there is hope. ”

Stephen started to his feet. “ Then go, and pray that he may live. Pray day and night ! Pray for his father’s sake—for his father’s sake ! ” cried he, wildly ; then, succumbing to the bodily and mental pain he had endured, he sank unconscious on the bench, and for hours heeded nothing that took place beside him.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## BETWEEN LIFE AND DEATH.

“O'er him still as death,  
Bent with hushed lips, that drank his scarce-drawn breath.”

*Don Juan, Canto II. 143.*

THE dinner at Thaneleigh had been kept waiting for Oswald, until his wife begged it might be delayed no longer; and when, in compliance with her wish, the family party sat down to table, Mr. Thane was almost as much put out as the cook. Henrietta exerted herself to talk incessantly, and so keep her uncle from noticing the damaged condition of the fish and *entrées*, while she listened with unwonted anxiety for the sound of her husband's step upon the gravel.

“Where can Oswald be?” presently ex-

claimed Mrs. Thane, unwitting of the young wife's efforts to make the head of the house forget his son's absence.

"I believe he has gone up to the keeper's, and he always finds a talk with Trimmer so very interesting, that perhaps he may not be back for an hour." She spoke with affected carelessness.

"I heard a shot, or rather two simultaneous shots, as I came downstairs," said Geoffrey. "He and Trimmer are having a shy at the rooks."

"I wish he would remember the dinner hour. My dear, you must teach him good manners," said Mr. Thane to Henrietta, in a tone of annoyance. He had detected the state of the dishes, notwithstanding her lively conversation.

After this the meal proceeded rather silently. The sweets made their appearance, and Henrietta was in the act of helping herself to iced pudding, when Jenkins, looking pale and scared, came into the room, and whispered in his master's ear.

Mr. Thane did not catch the butler's words. "What, Jenkins? What?" said he, aloud.

"You are wanted, sir. Please come; but don't say anything," returned Jenkins, in faltering accents.

Mr. Thane rose from the table. Henrietta, who had dropped the spoon from her hand, followed his example.

"What is the matter?" said she, going towards the door with Mr. Thane.

Jenkins put himself in her way. "Stay here, ma'am. For God's sake stay here!" he cried, wildly.

She motioned him aside imperiously, and went out into the hall. What was this?—this prostrate form upon a shutter, being borne by men to the foot of the stairs? She was beside it in an instant; she bent over it. It was Oswald, her husband! For one instant her senses swam; the next, she comprehended all the necessities of the situation. She looked round for her uncle; he had

sunk helpless into Geoffrey's arms. She turned back to the men. "Take him upstairs at once!" she said. "And you, Jenkins, go for Dr. Drew! Geoffrey, telegraph to London for Corbett!" She accompanied them upstairs; she prepared the bed; she assisted the men to lay him there; while the servants, like a flock of birds in a high wind, flew aimlessly hither and thither. "Brandy," she said, the instant they had laid him down. Some one gave it her. She was just in the act of inserting a few drops between his closed lips, when Dr. Drew entered the room.

The under-keeper had not only possessed sufficient wisdom to go to the Lodge for help, as being nearer than Thaneleigh, but had also despatched from thence a boy for Dr. Drew.

The doctor went to the bedside, and put his hand upon the wounded man's heart.

"He is not dead. I am sure he is not dead," murmured Henrietta.

"No ; he is not dead," returned the doctor, with trembling lips.

There was indeed a faint, faint flutter at Oswald's heart. The doctor took the brandy from her hand, and, motioning her to raise her husband's head, he succeeded in pouring a small quantity of the liquid down the senseless man's throat. Then he cut away the clothing and examined the wound, Henrietta all the while giving him the help he needed.

"I can do nothing by myself. I must wait for a surgeon. Geoffrey has gone to Bladton for Trevor ; but I doubt if he will do anything until Corbett arrives," said Dr. Drew to her presently, in answer to her entreating eyes. "I am afraid the bullet is in a delicate position."

"Bullet !" said Henrietta. "How can there be a bullet ? Men do not use bullets for rook-shooting."

He looked quickly at her. It was evident she knew nothing of the real cause of

Oswald's wound, and imputed it to accident. "There is a bullet here, however," said the doctor, turning from her.

Meanwhile, Mr. Thane knelt beside his son's bed in an agony of horror and grief. Sometimes he stared at the ghastly face on the pillow; sometimes at the two faces, hardly less ghastly, which bent from time to time over Oswald's; but more often he buried his own face in his hands, paralyzed with a dumb despair.

Without sense or motion lay the wounded man, his dark hair clustering round his pallid brow, his long lashes drooping upon his ashen cheeks. So faint were his pulse-beats, that at times they seemed to have gone altogether; so feeble his breathing that often Henrietta thought it had quite fluttered away.

Thus for three hours they waited the arrival of the Bladton surgeon; three hours of intense anxiety—hours that leave traces on the calmest hearts. At last the sound



of carriage wheels in the avenue was heard ; and in a few minutes, Geoffrey, with Mr. Trevor, entered the room. Mr. Thane rose hastily from his knees, and shrank into the shadow of the bed-curtains ; but Henrietta came a step forward to meet the surgeon, and when he bent over her husband, she went to the opposite side of the bed and watched his face. Not much could she read there. Trevor's expression of countenance matched his manners, which were of the blandest ; and neither expression nor manners usually changed in presence of the most difficult case. It was not likely they would change now, when he felt Henrietta's eyes were resting upon him in eager scrutiny. With the minutest care he examined the wound, then he moved the senseless form ; as he did so, a little sigh came from the wounded breast. He bent closely over him, then drew back, and spoke in a low tone to Dr. Drew. Finally he crossed the room to Henrietta.

“I hear you have telegraphed for Corbett.

I will wait until he comes. I cannot undertake the extraction of the ball without his consent and help." He spoke in his own professional tones.

"Will he live?" she asked, with her lips rather than her voice.

"So long as he breathes there is hope. Besides, he has such a fine constitution, that I think he will bear the operation successfully. You must take heart, Mrs. Thane."

The bland manner, the suave voice, were almost too much for her; she shuddered and turned away.

Mr. Trevor went back to the doctor. "It is a frightfully bad case. The bullet is almost in the left lung. I doubt very much if Corbett will dare to extract it," he said, in confidential tones to the poor old doctor; whose face, not being after a strictly professional type, nor under strictly professional control, fell despairingly. "For Heaven's sake, don't look like that, Drew; Mrs. Thane has her eyes on us," remonstrated Trevor.

“What a drivelling idiot this man is! And what an exquisite creature that woman is! I never saw such a figure in my life.” The two last observations, Mr. Trevor made to himself. He was a great admirer and an excellent judge of beauty, as are many men who have remarkably plain wives of their own at home. “What time did you telegraph to Corbett?” he asked of Geoffrey, who came to the bedside.

“At half-past eight.”

“Then he got the message at ten; in time to catch the half-past ten train, if he had no other urgent case. Still, he can’t be here till past two, and now it is a quarter to one. An hour and a half more, at any rate.”

“Is there any hope?” asked Mr. Thane, in an agonized whisper, creeping out from the shadow of the curtain. The father’s face was most grievous to behold; its pathetic appeal might have moved a heart of stone. The surgeon’s heart was by no means of

stone—it was only slightly ossified by use and wont.

“Certainly, there is hope, my dear sir,” he answered, quickly. “His pulse remains strong, and once the ball extracted you will see him revive. It will be a ticklish operation; but then it will be performed by the first operator in the world.”

The father listened as if Mr. Trevor had been a messenger from heaven, instead of an able but very earthly minded surgeon.

“Where is the rascal who shot him? Not got off, I hope!” asked Mr. Trevor, his bland manner growing almost severe.

“I am sure—I really don’t know,” replied Mr. Thane, falteringly, trying to grasp and put together the confused accounts he had heard of the duel, and failing in his attempt.

“I sincerely hope he is locked up; such madmen ought to be under control.” Here Mr. Trevor went back to the bed, and again felt Oswald’s pulse. “I wish we could get Corbett here an hour earlier. His pulse

is getting lower," he murmured to Dr. Drew.

The clock struck one. More and more awful grew the suspense. Over and over again Henrietta thought she saw the death shadow steal over her husband's beautiful face. Over and over again she touched his hand to feel if it were still warm. Once his eyelids faintly flickered, and she bent down, trying to see into his eyes; but they closed, and were again still.

Two o'clock struck. The very being of the watchers seemed to hang suspended with that of the wounded man. The clock on the chimney-piece told the quarter, and then the half-hour, and yet there came no sound on the stillness of the May night, save the nightingales' rapturous song. From an elm tree near the house, one sang out in passionate rivalry of another in an oak tree half way to the wood, while from the wood itself came a full chorus of song, heard faintly in the silent chamber. Never in future days

did Henrietta hear a nightingale but she saw the dimly lighted room, the watchers, the dying man stretched on the bed.

At a little past the half-hour, a thrush, in the great honeysuckle that draped the almond tree, warbled a few sleepy notes, as if not quite ready for his part of first vocalist in the dawn song. He seemed to be tuning his vocal chords, until, satisfied with the state of his voice, he chanted forth a glad welcome to the day, always repeating his brilliant cadences as if in love with his own music. Awakened by his song, the birds in every tree and shrub, the sparrows in the eaves, and the canaries in the aviary burst into the full, delicious pæan of the day—the day whose first grey light had not yet appeared.

Just as the birds were singing their loudest, the desired sound of carriage wheels was again heard in the distance. It came nearer. The birds in the avenue trees ceased singing, alarmed at the presence of humanity

at such an hour. The great surgeon was met at the hall door by Mr. Trevor, and after a few minutes' consultation was by him conducted into the bedroom. The people of Rome, on the day of Lake Regillus, hardly looked on the glorious forms of the DioscURI with more confidence and adoration, than did the watchers by Oswald's bed on this worn, middle-aged man, who, giving a silent bow to Henrietta, bent over his patient, examining and probing the wound. With a sort of fascination, Henrietta's eyes followed the skilful fingers that had brought ease and healing to so many tortured frames; and, coming nearer, she waited for his words.

"I must extract the ball at once; it is pressing on the lungs. Clear the room," he said, raising his calm but weary face.

All the servants retired quickly from the room, as did also Mr. Thane and Geoffrey.

Henrietta laid her hand on the surgeon's arm. "Will he live?" she murmured.

"It is possible. There is a slight hope,"

he answered, looking at the beautiful woman, whose great dark eyes rested on him as the arbiter of life and death. Standing there, in her white evening dress, she seemed a marble statue of suspense. "You will not stay?" he said.

"Will he become conscious?" she asked.

"It is possible."

"Then I shall stay!" and she resumed her former position on the other side of the bed, able to endure anything with the hope that Oswald's eyes would uncloze on hers again.

The skilful fingers commenced their task; they had wrought wonders for humanity so often, over and over again bringing life out of death—would they work the wonder now? The operation was long and difficult. The ball had penetrated deeply. At last, however, it was reached, and with exquisite delicacy removed from its perilous nearness to the lungs. A few minutes more and it was extracted.

As the ball was moved from its first



position, Oswald gave a gasping sigh and opened his lips. The surgeon signified to Mr. Trevor that he should give him stimulant, which he seemed to make some effort to swallow, but failed.

“Pulse?” asked the surgeon.

“Nearly gone,” replied Trevor, who held the wounded man’s arm.

At this moment the ball was extracted from the breast and given by the surgeon to Dr. Drew.

“Try again,” said the great man to Trevor.

Again a few drops of stimulant were poured into Oswald’s mouth, and this time successfully. Another sigh, his eyes opened and rested half consciously upon his wife. She bent forward, but the great surgeon quickly interposed.

“More stimulant,” he said.

They gave him more, which, after a little difficulty, he swallowed; and then again his eyes sought his wife. He tried to move his right hand towards her.

"You may take his hand, but not speak," said the surgeon.

She laid her hand on her husband's. As she did so he smiled an anguished smile, and closed his eyes.

"You must give him stimulants, in spite of the fever certain to set in. He has lost so much blood that without them he may fade away in an instant," said the great surgeon, when Mr. Trevor presumed to offer an opinion on the treatment of the patient. "I leave him in your hands. I am compelled to return to town now, but I will come down again to-night. You will, of course, remain here for some hours?"

"I can stay until the eight o'clock train, and I will return later on in the day," replied Mr. Trevor.

"That will do. Please telegraph to me, both when you leave here at eight, and later on."

This conversation between the two surgeons took place in Oswald's dressing-room.

They had discussed the patient's case, or rather the London surgeon had explained his views to the Bladton surgeon, who listened with all humility, save in the matter of stimulants; and the great man was preparing to depart. Just then Mr. Thane came into the room. Without a word he took the surgeon's hand and looked in his face.

"You want my opinion?" said Mr. Corbett, in his calm, equal tones. "The operation has been quite successful, and there is now a hope of recovery. The danger lies in the fever which will supervene; still, if your son possess as splendid a constitution as he does physique he will get through. Above everything he must be kept absolutely still; he must neither speak nor move for hours. You will not go to him." This admonition was given because the surgeon saw how greatly the father was moved.

"I will do just what you say. God bless you!" murmured Mr. Thane, again wringing the delicate hand. Then, desirous of heaping

all attentions and honour on this man, who was a visible providence, he led him down to the dining-room, insisted on his taking refreshment, and finally accompanied him to the carriage, saying for farewell, "You will come again to-night?"

"What a splendid family! It will be a pity if the young man dies," said the great surgeon to himself, as he leaned back in the Thaneleigh carriage and fell fast asleep. His sleep continued until he reached Bladton, where he took the London express, and went to sleep again.

For many days and nights Oswald lay between life and death. Sometimes they almost thought death had conquered, and then again life had the upper hand. Presently, the dreaded fever seized him, and all hope vanished for a while.

One night, a week after the encounter, he lay restlessly moving and moaning, too weak to utter even his delirious fancies. Mr. Trevor had seen him late in the evening,

and Henrietta, quick to mark the slightest change of expression in the bland surgeon's face, had noticed how grave his eyes had grown as he looked at his patient. With a sinking heart she administered the composing draught, and waited long for it to take effect. By slow degrees he became quieter, until, at last, his fitful sleep deepened into actual slumber. Hardly able to believe in the blessed calm which overshadowed him, she sat watching her husband with thankful but weary eyes. She passed some time thus, her eyelids growing heavier and heavier. By-and-by they drooped and closed. She leaned back in her chair, and slept as quietly, but not so deeply as Oswald. She was awakened by the morning light shining through the Venetian blinds. Hastily she rose and gazed at the sleeping man. Yes, he still slept. It was no dream.

In a minute or two Mr. Thane crept into the room on stealthy feet, and stood gazing at his son, too joyful to speak. The morning,

wore on; still he slept. All sounds in the house were hushed, the servants stole noiselessly about, the dogs were banished, the conservatory was darkened to silence the canaries there, and, could Mr. Thane have hushed the birds in the garden, he had gladly done so.

Noon came. The sun crossed the meridian. It was afternoon. The birds in the garden left singing; the distant low of home-coming kine could be heard. The shadows grew long; it was five o'clock. Henrietta had at an early hour of the morning gone to lie down, and, waited on by her aunt, hearing news from time to time of her husband's continued slumber, she had remained in a sweet state of half-dreamy consciousness, until aroused by the coming of tea.

"Can he possibly be asleep now? Suppose he were——" She stopped in her speech, wrapped her long white dressing-gown round her, and went back to her husband's room.

There was no question as to his being asleep. His low, regular breathings could be distinctly heard in the silent chamber. As she came beside him, however, a slight quiver went over his features, as if he were aware, even in his sleep, of her presence. She watched him long and tenderly, and as she watched, his large dark eyes, awful in the thinness and pallor of his face, opened, and rested on hers. She bent over him with one rapturous kiss, then, immediately controlling herself, ordered the nurse to bring nourishment.

“What makes me so weak?” asked Oswald, in feeble tones, as he put out his hand to hers.

“You have been very ill; but you are better now; only you must not talk, nor even think. Now, dear, eat this.” She spoke calmly.

He let her feed him, a wondering smile on his face, and then again sank back to sleep.

From this time he mended; not without occasional relapses, and much weariness and painfulness; still, he mended surely. "His splendid constitution has brought him through," said Corbett. "Corbett's divine skill has brought him through," said Trevor. "God's mercy has brought him through," said the old doctor; while Mr. Thane echoed each and all of these medical opinions.

In one of the days of his early convalescence, when all his friends' hearts were glad and grateful, Mrs. Thane the tactless said something in Henrietta's presence concerning the author of all their misery, which caused the young wife to open her eyes.

Mr. Thane, much annoyed, and compelled to some sort of explanation, began to give a confused account of the quarrel between Oswald and Stephen.

For a few minutes Henrietta listened in amazed silence; then, as an inkling of the truth came to her mind, she turned quickly from her uncle. "I will not hear it," she



said loftily; "I will never hear it, unless Oswald chooses to tell me."

"You are right, my noble girl," cried Mr. Thane, in great emotion, and he kissed her tenderly.

Meanwhile, at Burley, Stephen's examination before the magistrates had taken place, and he had been committed for trial. Farmer Billington had offered bail to any extent, which the magistrates, after some demurring, allowed. But Stephen absolutely refused to accept it, declaring he would rather go to prison. Such was indeed the case. Prison seemed to him a refuge from the world, with which he had no more concern. With his own hand he had cut all the threads once binding him to life; the task of knitting them together again would be painfully difficult, perhaps impossible. Wearied out in body and soul, one thing alone could he desire—to lie beside Phoebe on the slope, forgetting and forgotten.

At Stephen's first appearance before the

magistrates, his victim had been in too dangerous a condition for any decision on the wording of the charge against him to be possible; he was therefore remanded for a week, and when it was found the week had placed Oswald Thane in a hopeful state, the charge against him was, "Attacking with intent to murder." On this charge he was committed for trial. The evidence against him was of course only circumstantial, seeing that only he and Oswald Thane had been present at the duel; but the proving of the threat he had used to his enemy, after the inquest, and Trimmer's account of finding him beside the wounded man, told convincingly against him.

Naturally enough, the compassion Mr. Thane had once felt for Stephen changed into resentment against his son's would-be murderer. He could not see Oswald lying on the very threshold of death, nor bear all the cruel anguish of fear through the long days, without indignation. He was present

at Stephen's second appearance before the magistrates. He did not of course sit on the bench ; still, the fact of his being there, no doubt made his brother magistrates hesitate as to allowing bail. He could not help being in some degree touched by the young man's exhausted manner and death-like face ; but the calmness and even stolidity with which he heard the judgment of the bench, exasperated the amiable manufacturer, and made him remember the yet more deathlike face at home.

A few days after Stephen's committal, when Oswald was quite out of danger, and had for the first time been moved from his bed to a sofa, Mr. Thane sent Henrietta out of doors with Geoffrey, and he remained in happy attendance on his son.

Oswald listened languidly to his father's talk, making only monosyllabic replies ; and presently silence fell on both.

Oswald mused long and deeply. "Father," said he, after a time, "where is Stephen ?"

"He is in Burley gaol," replied Mr. Thane, in a low voice.

"In Burley gaol?" cried Oswald, fixing his great dark eyes on his father.

"Yes, in Burley gaol. He did not attempt to escape, and was taken into custody by Perks." Mr. Thane spoke quickly, as if he would fain have done with the subject.

"Then he has been committed for trial?" said Oswald.

"Yes. The magistrates would have taken bail, in spite of my remonstrances, but he refused it."

"When will he be tried? Tell me everything; I cannot keep asking questions," said Oswald, petulantly.

"He will be tried at midsummer, that is, in about a month's time; then you will be strong enough to prosecute."

"I shall not prosecute," said Oswald, firmly. "The quarrel was mine as well as his; it was fairly fought out. I only cannot understand why he should have hit me, and not I him."

“You did hit him; he was severely wounded in the right arm. But Oswald, you will be compelled to prosecute him.”

“Who will compel me?” said Oswald, something of the old fire in his eyes and voice.

“Hush, hush! you must not excite yourself. Everything shall be as you wish,” said Mr. Thane, soothingly.

“That certainly shall be as I wish. No power on earth would make me do a thing I did not choose to do,” replied Oswald, a good deal of excitement in his manner; then more quietly he continued, “He and I only know the circumstances. If I refuse to prosecute, we shall be pronounced equally guilty of duelling; we shall get off with a fine, and—we shall be quits.”

“But what if he should confess he forced the duel on you?”

“Who says he forced the duel on me?” asked Oswald, quickly.

“No one, my boy, no one; I am only supposing he should confess.”

"He will never be such a fool," said Oswald, turning from his father, to smile at his wife, who came into the room, a great bunch of roses in her hand.

"You look hot, Oswald. You have been talking too much ; you will have to be silent for the rest of the day," she said.

In the evening of the same day, as it was growing dusk, Oswald, who still lay on the sofa, opened his eyes after an appearance of slumber, during which he had not actually slept, and fixed them on Henrietta. His wife was leaning out at the window, listening if the nightingales would sing that night ; for the spring had passed, and the once untiring songsters were busy with family cares, and had not much time to spare for singing.

"Dear," said Oswald, in low tones, "come and sit beside me ; I have something to say to you."

She came and took a chair by the head of the sofa.

"Give me your hand, but don't look at

me. I shall never tell you if you look at me," he murmured.

"You have talked enough to-day," said she, gently. "Tell me another day."

"No, no! I have made up my mind to tell you now; and, who knows, you may hear it from some one else; perhaps you have already heard it."

"No, Oswald. If it is what I imagine, I never would hear it from any one but you. Something was said in my presence the other day, but I refused to have it explained."

He clasped her hand closer, and in the growing twilight told her the woeful story. He told it truly; yet it was impossible but that its truth should be tinged with the colouring of the relater's mind, and that his estimation both of the magnitude of the temptation, and of the venial guilt of succumbing to it, should in a manner palliate the wrong-doing.

She heard it in utter silence. He ended, and she did not speak. A great dread fell

upon Oswald. He had nerved himself to this confession, because he knew that the fact of the duel must enlighten her on the past he would fain have veiled from her for ever; and knowing this, he had known also how his only course with a woman like Henrietta lay in candid confession. If he were silent, she would never say a word, but they two would be eternally divided; whereas, did he tell her the whole truth, she would, however disgusted, in time forgive him; and now, when in painful humiliation he had confessed his fault, she did not speak.

“Henrietta, for God’s sake speak! Blame me! hate me! but speak!” he cried, trying to draw her towards him.

But she sat erect, her face turned from him, only she did not take her hand from his.

“I sinned against you; but I swear I never loved any woman but you,” he moaned.

And this was the worth of a man’s love!



It could not even keep him true to its object, when at its strongest—before possession. She tore her hand from his, and, rising, went to the window. The most vulnerable part of her—her pride—was sorely wounded. When she had refused to hear her uncle's version of the story, she had not dreamed the reality to be so bad as this. It was hateful! Men were hateful! Henrietta, though so often the awakener of passion in men, was herself passionless; indeed, could she but have kept her admirers exactly at the admiring point, without the fear of their going further, she had been entirely happy, living in a world she could quite understand. But that any man should, unrepelled by her, forsake her for another woman, was an unpardonable offence. And now she had to face the fact of such forsaking in the man who, at the very time of it, appeared her most devoted lover—the man who was now her husband. She had heard years ago that Oswald had a reputation for gaiety; but

this had only enhanced his charm, appearing to her, as to so many women, a sort of halo round a man's head. But this halo of gallantry makes a man shine in female eyes, only because they see the light from afar, and do not know that it is phosphorescent, the child of decay, the offspring of corruption. Could they but behold the factors of the halo close at hand, they would perceive the fair to be foul, the light to be darkness. Henrietta had suddenly chanced on such a reality, and it was hideous in her eyes—specially hideous as so nearly touching herself. She shrank from the contemplation with loathing; but the thing was too real to be passed by.

Long and long she stood before the window, watching the gloom steal over the park. A faint, quivering sigh from Oswald disturbed her, and through her rushed the memory of his danger, and her terrible anxiety. Should she suffer a by-gone offence to blot out the remembrance of all his devo-

tion, all his tenderness, all his love? She turned and looked at him; looked at his beautiful pale face, at his great weary eyes lifted to hers in unutterable pleading. Slowly she crossed the room, and, coming close to him, bent over him.

He threw his arms round her. "Do you forgive me?" he whispered.

She was moved at this supreme moment, not only out of, but above herself. "Do you forgive *me*?" she asked. "If I had frankly accepted you, this would never have happened. I was——"

He stopped her words with kisses.

"Dear," she said presently, raising her face from his and looking straight into his eyes, "there is no shadow between us. We understand each other entirely; but never in all our lives let us speak of this again."

"You are the noblest woman that ever lived!" he said.

However that might be, this certainly was the noblest moment of Henrietta's life, and,

indeed, of Oswald's, too, and by it their mutual affection was strengthened more than they knew. The pride of both had been momentarily killed. The bitter humiliation of having to confess, the almost more bitter humiliation of having to hear the confession, had shown both how utterly dependent they were on each other. If the wife would not forgive, if the husband were not faithful, life was spoilt for both. Humbled by the fear of loss, they both did what was most difficult to both—abased themselves. Such an event must affect the whole of their future relationship; and though, doubtless, Oswald would again be petulant and exacting, Henrietta again cold, yet this moment's perfect union remaining in the inner consciousness of each, would do more towards consummating the true marriage—the marriage of heart and soul—than a lifetime of tender words and passionate caresses.

## CHAPTER XV.

## BURLEY GAOL.

“And I, a man, and lacketh liberty.”

*The King's Quhair.*

THOUGH much shocked at the turn of affairs, Farmer Billington did not forsake the man he regarded in some sort as his charge. The extreme diversity of thought between himself and Stephen had, oddly enough been rather a bond of union than a cause for antipathy, and now the lad was in trouble, he was, according to his old-fashioned belief, the more bound to stand by him. “The lad’s a good lad, but he’s got damnable principles; an’ it’s all along o’ them he’s got into this scrape,” remarked the good man to his wife.

"And what sort of principles had the other man got?" retorted Mrs. Billington, begging the question, like a true woman.

When Stephen refused the farmer's bail, his faithful friend urged him to accept various alleviations of his position, all of which he rejected, except writing materials and books. He hoped in his self-imposed solitude to be again able to read. But the habit was lost, the power of self-forgetfulness, too, was gone. In the northern town where he had dwelt since quitting Hillford, his life had been passed between work and thought; he did not try to read then—he could not begin now. He was free from the horror of having caused a father's misery, for he knew that Oswald Thane was out of danger; but now the dread of a long imprisonment harassed his soul. When he had refused bail, and thankfully sheltered his head within the walls of Burley gaol, he had been sick of life. Life had been somehow with him a grand mistake. Perhaps all lives were mis-

takes, yet his was a greater one than ordinary. Anyhow, the quiet, the isolation of this solitude were welcome; for in it he would be quit of inquisitive tongues and prying eyes.

For a short while he hugged himself with this thought, but only for a short while. The solitude, in which he found it impossible to read, began to grow irksome; and if it were so when he was a prisoner by his own will, what would it be when he was such by the will of others? Surely he would find it a thousand times harder. Suppose his sentence should be seven—fourteen years—how could he, the enthusiast of freedom, bear restraint? Though town-born, and compelled to spend the greater part of his life in the gloom and noise of factories, he loved the open air. This love made him cling to the cottage on Tory, where he was above the town, and where, from the wide view it commanded, he had always the sensation of being out of doors. He was not, as the

martyrs for religion and freedom have been, strong to bear a lifetime of imprisonment; because he did not suffer like them, for a divine idea, but for a personal wrong. How should he bear to relinquish the noblest of all birthrights, the grandest of all estates, the heritage to which every man was entitled—liberty? Liberty of thought, liberty of speech, liberty of action—he had used them all with a sort of passion, as if to show they were his; and now the first alone remained, and that was torture. Yes; and as thought became torture, would not solitude become hell? The prison walls seemed to heighten above, and narrow around him. Perhaps he should go mad. Like the imprisoned king of mediæval times, he cried—

“And I, a man—and lacketh liberty!”

At times he regretted not having yielded to his impulse of suicide. Had he quitted this life by his own act, he would at least have been even with Phœbe, and have received a tender welcome into the world of spirits.



One hot, stifling afternoon, at the end of June, he was lying on the mattress in his cell, trying to read, when the door opened, and Farmer Billington appeared.

"Well, my lad, how are you?" said the farmer, going up to Stephen, and taking a seat on the mattress beside him.

"I am very well, thank you; but it is hot, and I am tired," replied the young man, faintly.

"Hot! I should think it is; but, bless the man! heat's good for folks once a year," said the farmer, puffing a good deal. "And as to tired, what business ha' you got to be tired a-lyin' here? But, däne it, Steäve, you looks like one o' Jäne's withered yallow lilies."

The difference between the farmer's rosy face and Stephen's pallid countenance was, indeed, enormous, though not greater than the difference between the healthy mind of the one, and the morbid mind of the other.

"Steäve," said the farmer, seeing the weary

Stephen not inclined to talk, "I've come to you agen about employin' a lawyer for your trial. The missus she says to me, 'The foolish lad'll repent, when it's too late.' 'I knows it,' says I. 'He ought to have the artfullest talker in Burley. A man as conducts his own case never does no good.' Why, the judge looks on such a proceedin' as a regular insult to the profession, an' is sure to set the jury on the wrong scent. An' as to juries, they're for all the world like a pack o' hounds wi' no noses o' their own; jest waitin' for the master to give 'em the scent, an' then they're down on the game in a minute.' 'Well then, you go down agen, and persuade the 'lad,' says the missus. So here I am."

"I am quite prepared to conduct my own case; and as I have made up my mind to tell the whole truth about the duel, I don't see what good a lawyer would be," said Stephen, wearily.

"Yes, you'll conduct yerself into I don't know how many years of penal servitude;

that's what you'll do. Well, if you've got a fancy for stoppin' in prison till your hair's turned grey, I've got nothin' to say agen it."

A spasm passed over Stephen's face; he sat upright. "Would you have me tell a lie by pleading 'not guilty'?" cried he.

"I dunno about a lie," said the farmer, slowly shaking his head. "You see, the law's the contradictinest thing in the world. When you pleads 'not guilty,' the law doesn't suppose you are expressin' any opinion about your past acts; it only supposes you are tryin' to get off bein' punished for 'em if you can; and I don't see why you shouldn't get off; you and Oswald Thane are the only witnesses of the duel; you both fought, for both were wounded; and at any rate I believe they'll let you off light if the thing's well managed. So now, Steäve, do listen to me. I should hate it when I was ridin' about a-top of Oakwood Hill, wi' the west wind blowin' in my face, to think o' you, shut up in four walls, breathin' an infernal air like this."

The farmer's words thrilled through Stephen, picturing, as they did, in sharpest contrast, the free man and the prisoner; the blessed air of heaven, the accursed breath of captivity. A choking sensation rose in his throat, and, hiding his face in his hands, he wept.

"Come, my lad, none o' that," said the farmer, cheerily, though his own eyes were dim. "There's no need for that; only say the word, and I'll find the man as can get you off light."

"Yes, go and find him—a lawyer, a barrister, the best you can get; I will plead 'not guilty;' I will lie, or anything else for my liberty," cried Stephen, in passionate pain.

The day of trial came. The judge sat on the bench; many counsellors sat at the table; the jury were sworn, and into the court, crowded with eager Hillford faces, Stephen Carr was brought to answer the charge against him. As he took his place he gave a comprehensive

glance around. He noted the judge's clear-cut, high-nosed visage, with an amused remembrance of the farmer's quaint talk; noted the unintelligent faces of the jurymen, and thought how certain they were to follow the judge's lead; noted Farmer Billington's comical face, Parson Evelyn's distressed, and Lux Garland's anxious one; noted Mr. Thane, and beside him—his beauty dimmed by exceeding paleness, his strength changed into languor—the prosecutor, Oswald Thane.

The eyes of the young men met, and both remembered the deadly conflict in Hillford Wood; but to Stephen it seemed that in Oswald's dark orbs was a gleam of triumph.

The indictment was read, and it was demanded of the prisoner at the bar if he were guilty or not guilty.

No fallacious arguments, no desire for liberty, could hinder Stephen from a sharp twinge of shame as he pleaded "Not Guilty." His ghastly cheeks flushed, he cast down his eyes. Silence succeeded; and every one

looked towards Oswald Thane's counsel to begin the statement of the prosecution. But that gentleman did not speak aloud; he only whispered a few words in Oswald's ear. Then slowly, leaning on the learned man's arm, Oswald rose and turned to the judge—

“My lord and gentlemen of the jury,” he said, in a voice which it was evident he made distinct by a great effort, “I am expected to prosecute the accused. I absolutely refuse to do this; if he be guilty of duelling, so am I—the quarrel between us was even, the fight perfectly fair; I can say no more.” He drooped on the counsel's arm, and sat down in his place.

A dead silence, and then a burst of tremendous applause. The many factory workers from Hillford used both feet and hands with great effect. They rejoiced in the generosity and manliness of Oswald's words, as the gods in a theatre always rejoice at the utterance of noble sentiments.

“Clear the court! Such expressions of

opinion in a court of justice are abominable, and must be suppressed!" said the judge, in an awful voice.

The majesty of the law was however left to take care of itself for a while, if one might judge by the long time which elapsed before silence was restored.

Oswald's words went straight to Stephen's heart, revealing his enemy's generosity, his own meanness; straightway he took his resolution. "May I speak?" he asked, so soon as he could be heard.

The judge, amazed at the extraordinary character of the proceedings, and deeming it impossible the case could become less regular than it was already, gave the permission asked by the prisoner.

"My lord," said Stephen, in a firm voice—he did not think it necessary to address the jury—"I have pleaded 'Not Guilty; I did this through fear of long imprisonment, and against my first and honest resolution. I now confess that I forced the quarrel on Mr.

Thane ; he had no choice but to accept it and to fight. In his generosity he would quit me of the charge ; but I declare myself guilty of the crime laid against me."

A deeper silence than that after Oswald Thane's words fell on the court. Every eye was turned on the weary-faced, ghastly man at the bar, whose clothes hung on his shrunken form in folds. He stood, his eyes fixed on the judge, his arms folded on his breast. A great sympathy touched many a heart, for all knew his story ; even those bundles of parchment tied up with red tape, which judges and counsellors bear instead of hearts, thrilled with a faint emotion.

A long consultation succeeded Stephen's speech ; judge and lawyers seemed actually at fault. A case where the prosecutor declined to prosecute, and the prisoner criminated himself, was a puzzling and unheard-of case ; seeming to require neither judge nor jury of an ordinary type. At first it appeared that, in spite of the refusal of Mr. Thane



to prosecute, the trial would proceed, and probably result in the sentencing of the accused to a short term of imprisonment; but, after much talking, when the unusual circumstances of the case had been taken into consideration, it was decided to inflict a fine upon Stephen Carr.

Bewildered by the unexpected aspect of affairs, Stephen looked on and listened, trying to see the end of all this talk. When the end came, and the judge pronounced sentence, the young man could hardly believe his own ears, and not until he was aroused by being ushered from the court into a side room, where he was seized by Farmer Billington and Lux Garland, did he in truth comprehend how the awful vista of lengthened imprisonment, the payment coined out of his heart's blood, had been commuted into a money fine, which had at once been paid by the farmer from the sum entrusted to his care when Stephen dispersed his household goods and fled from Hillford.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### WESTWARD HO!

“Nor is it  
Wiser to weep a true occasion lost,  
But trim our sails, and let old bygones be.”

*The Princess.*

ONE intensely hot August night, when the City air was thick with sickening odours, making the breath of urban life a horror, Alured St. Maur threaded the close streets in the neighbourhood of London Bridge in search of Stephen Carr. At every step he was met by one fragment or another of those social problems in which the present century—so loudly vaunted for its moral and physical advancement—has ever more deeply involved us. The reformer was a hopeful man, as all

reformers had need be ; yet, in spite of himself, he sighed, and turned with a sense of relief into the mean house which answered to the address communicated to him by Lux Garland.

In a bare, dingy room, he found the man he sought, bending over a box, wherein he was packing tools. At St. Maur's entrance he rose and came forward a few steps.

"I heard you were on the point of departure from England, and have come to bid you good-bye," said the earl's son, grasping the mill-manager's hand.

"You are very kind," replied Stephen, shrinking a little from his visitor.

"I could not let you go without telling you how sorry I am you should choose to leave your country, while there is so much to be done," said St. Maur, with pleasant frankness.

"I cannot do it," said Stephen, quickly. "What can a man do to whom life has grown hateful ?"

"But there are so many lives to care for besides one's own ; and in caring for these, a

certain sweetness does, I believe, temper the bitterest lot. You purposed to live for others once."

"My purpose is lost—it was wrecked in a wild storm of revenge. Nothing is left to me but my individual freedom; for that I am thankful. I mean to use it to the utmost in the Western States of America."

St. Maur looked steadfastly at Stephen's weary face and languid eyes, estimating by these, as much as by his words, the loss of mental energy in the once enthusiastic Radical. He noted, moreover, with the eye of an athlete, the shrunken frame and flaccid limbs, and felt that the recovery of bodily force as well as health of mind, would be soonest attained in the free life of the Western world.

"Perhaps you are right, and this is the best thing for you; I know it must be very difficult to take up a work which has been laid down. I am only sorry that you feel you must go so far away. You had so much

influence with the people; you could help them better than most of us." St. Maur spoke very gently.

"But my influence has gone; I let it go. I had but one desire; it killed everything else. I sacrificed my work—I sacrificed the people's good—to my craving for revenge. I forgot the responsibilities of my manhood—forgot my oppressed brothers and sisters—and cared only for a personal satisfaction. I sinned—perhaps I sinned against my own soul; I cannot tell; certainly I sinned against the people, whose cause I declared to be mine."

"You are right," answered St. Maur, with emotion. "You can see now how you left your work at the very time when you might have done it more effectually than ever before. You had suffered as but few men suffer. Your words would have had the greater weight, your acts the more inspiring effect. You might have led the people—led them along and up the path of moral and political improvement." He paused, and laid his white

hand on Stephen's arm. "My dear fellow," he said, candidly, "don't think I am blaming you too hardly. I believe that had I been placed as you were I should have acted as you did; yet I should have been wrong. But after all, there is nothing so unwise as to 'Burden our remembrance with a heaviness that's gone.' So let us turn to the future. You are young. You have a new world before you. Time is all-powerful; he can change the bitterest suffering into a calm regret. New scenes, too, are not without effect in dimming the vividness of the past. Work will attend you wherever you go, and I am sure you will not be unworthy of your nobler self."

"Thank you, Mr. St. Maur; you wake up the old spirit within me, when you prophesy good of me still," said Stephen, a faint light coming into his face.

"I am sorry to interrupt a Radical duet, whose *motif* is doubtless the great 'to be'; when all the old world discords shall be re-

solved into the harmonies of the future," said a voice at the door ; and Lux Garland, mocking as ever, entered the room. "Steeve, you are a mean fellow," he said, when he had greeted both men. "You intended to sail 'to the West' without taking leave of me ; but I heard from Mr. Billington of your plans. He said you would start for Liverpool the first thing to-morrow. Is it so?"

"Yes, this is my last night in London. I go to Liverpool by the first train to-morrow, and directly I get there I shall embark for 'the Land of the Free,'" replied Stephen, an almost happy smile on his face at this proof of Lux Garland's friendship.

"'Land of the Free!'" retorted the secretary, with intense scorn. "Yes, indeed ; but the freedom works two ways. You are perfectly free to express your opinions ; but if they don't agree with mine, I am equally free to do what an oppressive law prevents my doing in this enslaved country—stab you with a bowie-knife."

"You are just the same, Mr. Lux ; London hasn't altered you," said Stephen, gazing with a sort of fascination at Lux..

"Not altered me ! I am so glad you think so. I was afraid I was getting fat, and had begun to have serious ideas of the Athletic Club."

"You look well ; but I do not mean that. I always thought when you went out in the world—the 'swell world'—it would have the same effect on you as on other men."

"Good God, man ! did you suppose because Lord Limpet sticks to the Government, and I, his humble servant, stick to Lord Limpet, there should be no more hand-shaking and friendly talk between the men of Hillford ? Yes, indeed, for the sake of our cloth there shall." Lux spoke jestingly, but there was an undertone of earnestness in his words.

"You have only just returned from Hillford, have you ?" asked Stephen.

"This morning. Oh ! and, old boy, I bring you heaps of 'farewells,' and good



wishes from Mr. and Mrs. Billington, the parson, and all my own people, besides numbers of folks I can't remember."

"Are all your friends well? Mrs. Garland and Miss Daphne?" asked Stephen, in a voice he could not keep firm.

"Quite well. My mother is absorbed in preserves, and Daphne occupied with the children and 'matters of the house,' as becomes a woman—leaving all flights to her brother's stronger wing."

St. Maur, who had sat by amused at the conversation, here laughed.

Lux turned to him. "I know I am talking heresy; forgive me," he cried, shrugging his shoulders. "I will not do it again, especially I will be careful when I go out to New York to call on Steeve; the women are almighty there—more powerful than the dollar."

"But I am not going to New York," said Stephen. "I am going to the wilds of Colorado——"

"Or the Salt Lake," suggested Lux.

"I met a man in the North who is going to join me. We shall put our little capital together, and buy a few acres of land," continued Stephen, smiling at Lux's interruption.

"Ah, well! you will have squatted comfortably by next summer, and have built yourself a log hut. I shall come out and see you; so provide yourself with a good store of tobacco, and we will smoke the calumet with the Indians."

The appearance of Lux cast quite a glow over Stephen's last hours in England, and somehow enabled him to finish his preparations for departure with an almost cheerful heart. St. Maur and Lux went away together, walking slowly westward through the stifling streets.

"That is the finest fellow I ever knew!" said Lux. "It is the awfulest shame that Fate has served him so!"

"I am very glad you came. Seeing you

brightened him up wonderfully," returned St. Maur.

"I must say you looked rather like a couple of lap-dogs in a thunder-shower when I arrived. What on earth made you so depressed?"

"We had been talking on serious subjects."

"My dear Heraclitus, you would make any subject serious; while I make every subject a jest. What a pity we cannot be rolled up together, and issue in the perfect man!"

"The perfect man is not composed of two males, but of male and female—

‘ Each fulfils

Defect in each, and always thought in thought,  
Purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow,  
The single, pure, and perfect animal,  
The two-cell'd heart, beating with one full stroke—  
Life.’”

St. Maur gave the words with spirit.

"That is very pretty. I wonder if it will ever receive an illustration in fact," said Lux. "All I can hope is that no woman

will ever attempt to make me take part in the illustration."

"We shall have you adopting Comtist ideas some day," returned St. Maur, with a smile, "and hear of you taking the chair at a woman's meeting."

"Harpies, Furies, Gorgons! may I be turned into stone if I do! Why, I don't even care for the Muses; the Graces are all I require."

"Pagan that you are! What can be done to convert you?"

"Well, I am going down to Evelynhurst, with Jack Evelyn; perhaps the sight of Lady Julia may convert me."

St. Maur actually shuddered. "My dear Garland, what can induce you to go there?" he asked.

"I am going to protect Jack from his step-mother; the gallant captain besought me so pathetically to accompany him, I really could not refuse. He is making extensive preparations for his visit; has had

new garments, has been shaved in a new and original manner, brushes his hair an hour every day, wears gloves, and has not smoked for a week, lest the odour of tobacco should remain in his whiskers."

"Poor Jack!" laughed St. Maur; "he has always been in terror of that woman."

"I suppose she does not crush Phil in the same way?"

"No; Phil is a man who never brooked interference, which she had sense enough to perceive; and now that she remains at Evelynhurst by his permission, she is almost agreeable to him. If she has any idea of the real state of Phil's health, she will try to be agreeable to Jack now," St. Maur ended with a sigh.

"You always croaked about Phil; but your gloomy prophecies have not been fulfilled."

"I wish with all my heart they may not be now; but I went over to see him last spring, and was shocked at the change in him. He is fading away, as he told me

himself; that is why he sent Jack to England—he wanted all business matters settled at once. But look, here we are at my club. Come in with me.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

## IN THE VICARAGE GARDEN.

"I know no ways to mince it in love, but directly to say  
'I love you.'"

*King Henry V. Act V. Scene ii.*

THE stirring events of which Hillford had been the scene left no trace on its pleasant hillside, and but little upon its inhabitants. Love, death, revenge, have each their moment—that moment passes, graving no mark on Nature, and only faint lines on the human heart, and these latter Time's noiseless hand labours ceaselessly to erase. In the rush of nineteenth century life, even retrospection becomes less and less possible, and only at rare intervals can a man ask himself, "Am I he who loved so passionately, who hated

so madly, who suffered so intensely? am I he to whom life once seemed impossible, who hugged despair?"

Our passionate loves die into nothingness; our fierce personal animosities merge themselves into indifference, or, perhaps even into actual friendships; only our political hatreds survive. These have a great tenacity of life, and are in many persons the only things remaining untouched by Time.

At Thaneleigh all was well. The master was nobler in presence, kinder to his people, more liberal-souled to the whole world. St. Maur, who, at the end of the summer, came down on a second electioneering attempt, this time with some hope of success, said that for the future, whenever he despaired of humanity, he should run down to Hillford and behold what was possible to it.

Oswald Thane, though not the strong man he had been, was yet gradually improving; his paleness and feebleness growing less every day. In character he was assuredly



changed for the better, both haughtiness and petulance being much toned down. No doubt his state of dependence, and yet more the sense of his wife's free forgiveness, wrought still in his heart. It cannot be predicted of him that the change in all its fulness will be lasting; for a man in weakness and a man in strength are two utterly different persons; yet it may well be hoped some good effect will remain.

Henrietta, too, was less imperious than of yore. Tenderness made no part of her nature, but then Oswald had sufficient of that for both—and she, if cold, was incapable of small jealousies and mean fears. For the first time in her life she had known regret—regret for having played with Oswald's love, and, by the mere fact of having acknowledged herself wrong, had grown more loveable.

Geoffrey, meanwhile, was beginning to hope he might one day renew his suit with a certainty of acceptance. He was constantly at the Croft, and though he could not flatter

himself there was any change in Daphne's frank manner towards him, yet faith in his own attractions made him believe she must in time be won. What girl could go on resisting a constant and rich lover, when no other aspirant appeared? So argued Geoffrey; so likewise argued Mrs. Garland, who did everything she could, in the way of extolling the young man, to make Daphne repent her past decision. As to Daphne herself, she had not changed nor forgotten; but she was young, and her great anxieties were lifted from her. Lux was well and happy in his new life, and would some future day be able to pay Geoffrey that hateful debt; and Hector had gone to school. The children were more manageable now, and the daily lessons not so wearying. Above all, the money troubles were less; and Daphne found the absence of irritating cares enough for content. Still, she occasionally remembered Phoebe's fate with a shudder, and forecasted her own with a sigh.

Of all our Hillford acquaintance, the vicar had changed the most. His step was slower and less firm, his figure more bowed, while on his sunny face lay often a shade of depression. The conviction of failure in his ministry distressed his soul; and besides this, he was again in parochial hot water. Now this species of bath, though agreeably stimulating to the priests of to-day, was a misery and vexation to old-fashioned parsons, and specially to Richard Evelyn. The calorific process had been this: the vicar, feeling and seeing his parish terribly neglected, dismissed the mouldy curate and sought a new one. Fresh from Oxford there arrived a young man, scientific, sanitarian, practical. This energetic person came at once into collision with the owners of cottages; therefore, hardly had he made the round of the parish, and preached his introductory sermon, when, "Latitudinarian!" was the cry. The cantankerous folks, who had erst shrieked "Puseyite!" grateful for a fresh cause of

displaying their self-assumed orthodoxy, loudly echoed the cry; and the vicar, much more alarmed now than formerly, at once represented to young Oxford the perils of advanced views, giving him to understand that unless he modified the expression of them, he must depart, and leave Hillford to stagnancy and mouldiness for the future.

As may be imagined, Mrs. Anson took no interest in affairs of the parish, but she approved of young Oxford's manners and family; and languidly pronounced her fellow-townfolk to be a set of "ignorant pagans." More devoted than ever to the contemplation of her own health, the vicarage lady passed her easy days; while her brother sighed wearily for the rest which an answering, sympathetic soul can give.

One splendid day, in the middle of August, just a week after Stephen Carr's departure from his native land, Daphne went, as was her wont, in the early afternoon, to practise with Mrs. Anson. It was

a day when the mere remembrance of town life seemed a horror; a day for the country, the mountain, the sea. A little tender west wind cooled the air, already growing hot again after the morning's heavy shower. It was a day when the mere act of breathing gladdened the heart; a day to be lived out of doors, to be rejoiced in, praised, and sung.

As Daphne walked slowly down the churchyard path, she pondered on a letter she had received that morning from Lux, wherein he gave a comical account of his visit to Evelynhurst, which ended thus: "The sight of Lady Julia has enlightened me as to the cause of the vicar's bachelordom. No man in his senses, with such a specimen of womanhood before him, would ever dream of matrimony. Jack and I are quite resolved never to quit our present blessed estate."

When the intending musician arrived at the vicarage, she found that both Mrs. Anson and the vicar had driven out; so, preferring to wait their return in the open

air, rather than enter the house, she strolled across the lawn towards the river. The flower beds blazed in their August glory—a glory enhanced, not injured, by the morning shower. The geranium leaves held great drops of water still, the calceolarias wept golden tears.

Daphne stooped to gather a bunch of white verbena and purple heliotrope, lingered to smell the ever-green honeysuckle, that climbed up the acacia tree; and then, leaving the lawn, turned down the vicar's pet path. The flowers in the borders shone with a more sober beauty than those on the lawn. The phloxes and Canterbury bells stood like stately dames attired in a bygone style, a little put out of countenance by present fashions; while the sweet-Williams, like antiquated beaux, attended on the ladies. Here, too, were visible the effects of the morning rain; the spiders' webs on the espaliers had threaded themselves with pearls. the drops on the sweet-briar glistened with

rainbow hues ere they quivered and fell. Many of Nature's most beautiful children were abroad to take the air and divert themselves, in the sunshine. A great Atalanta, superb in black and crimson, with just a dash of white, darted past the admiring maiden. A humming-bird moth, in soft, mouse-coloured plumage, poised itself in mid air, whirring its wings ceaselessly, while it inserted its delicate proboscis in the tubes of the phlox flowers. A dragon-fly, in dazzling green and gold, flew down to the river, and a blue-headed tom-tit perched jauntily on a rose tree, and looked Daphne in the face.

In the midst of all this brightness the girl's heart expanded with a sensation of happiness, which left no room for thought. She passed on to the river-side, and there, under the weeping willow, she sat down and watched the sunlight on the water.

A step came over the lawn and down the gravel walk. It was the vicar's, of course; he had returned early from his drive. Yet

surely the good man's step had grown oddly quick and impetuous; he had forgotten his three score and ten years. The step neared the willow tree, came up to the waiting maiden. She turned her head from the river and met the eager face, the outstretched hand of Jack Evelyn.

"Captain Evelyn," she said, starting to her feet, her face flushing, her heart beating.

"Yes, Captain Evelyn," replied Jack, some confusion in his manner. "You did not expect to see me, Miss Garland."

"No, indeed. I thought when I heard you coming that it was Mr. Evelyn," said Daphne, recovering a little from her extreme surprise.

"Ah! then I frightened you?" said Jack.

"No, you did not frighten me; you only astonished me. Did Mr. Evelyn know you were coming?" returned Daphne, her voice growing steady.

"Certainly not; I did not know it myself until last night."

"Is anything the matter with Lux?" cried



Daphne, the colour fading from her face, her lips parting with anxiety.

"No; Lux is as well as I am," said Jack, in a vexed tone. "He has been staying with me at Evelynhurst."

"Yes, I know; I had a letter from him this morning."

"Then how could you imagine there was anything the matter with him? What a happy fellow he is, to have rosy cheeks grow pale, and bright eyes dim, at the mere idea of any mishap befalling him! I envy him with all my heart!" Jack spoke quite fiercely.

"Mr. Evelyn and Mrs. Anson have gone out; but I dare say they will soon be back," said Daphne, the colour rising to her cheeks again.

"They may stay out as long as they like; I did not come to see either of them," said Jack, resolutely. "I came for my own sake. I came to find the girl I love; the girl I have loved since I first saw her playing the organ, nearly two years ago. Daphne, I am a blunt

sailor ; I can't tell an eloquent story ; I can only speak the plain truth, and ask a plain question. I love you ! can you love me ?" So saying, he took her hand, and gazed into her changing face, trying to read his answer in the drooping eyes and quivering lips.

She raised her eyes and gave him a shy glance. "Why did you go away ?" she murmured low.

"Because I was a fool. I was told you were engaged to Geoffrey Thane, and I believed it."

"Who told you ?" she cried, her eyes dilating.

"I cannot say ; it is enough that I know you are not," returned Jack, hastily. He was terribly impatient to know his fate.

Daphne tore her hand from his, and turned away to the river. A miserable fear had taken possession of her.

"Do you want to kill me with suspense ? Pray answer me !" cried Jack, earnestly.

"Lux has been talking to you," she murmured, in deadly shame.

"Lux told me last night, when we were having a confidential talk, that Geoffrey Thane had proposed to you, and you had refused him. He told me nothing else, I will swear. Is it not true that you refused him?" The sailor's rosy face grew pale with alarm.

"Yes, I did refuse him," answered Daphne, a little re-assured. "But are you certain Lux told you nothing else?"

"Quite certain. What was there to tell? Ah! forgive me if I am too impatient; but after waiting all these months, I feel as if I couldn't wait any longer."

Waiting all these months! Whose fault had that been but his own? Daphne could not help thinking this, even in the midst of the rapture his words brought her. "I was afraid Lux had told you—oh! I can't say—" She hesitated, in blushing confusion.

"Afraid he had told me what?" asked Jack emboldened by her blushes, and again he took her hand.

She raised her dark, soft eyes to his ; and again she drooped them. "I was afraid he had told you I was miserable when you went away," she whispered.

He drew her to him. But what need of more? Every one can imagine the end of acceptable love-making.

They sat down beneath the trees, while the river at their feet, the west wind on their brows, the glancing dragon-flies, the murmurous bees, all told of the ever-fading but ever-renewed freshness of youth and love and joy.

THE END.







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